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THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Borge Brende, CEO and president of World Economic Forum, says he will resign, after an independent investigation by the group into his **ties to convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein**

Instagram says it will start alerting parents if their kids repeatedly search for terms clearly associated with suicide or self-harm. The alerts will only go to parents who are enrolled in Insta's parental supervision programme

Three-time Tamil Nadu CM and expelled AIADMK veteran **O Panneerselvam is likely to join DMK today** & may contest from Bodinayakkanur in Theni

Vinicius Junior seals Real Madrid's progress to Champions League last 16 with a clincher against Benfica as holders PSG edge out 10-man Ligue 1 rivals Monaco

Fly Emirates

DOUBLE DELIGHT

Today's bumper issue of **TOI** is organised in two sections, both equally packed with news and analysis. To get the full reading experience of today's edition, make sure you don't miss the other section

OTHER BOOK TOP STORIES

- Taking mom's surname will not affect child's legal rights
- No calling passport applicants to police stations for checks
- ED moves court with orders to prosecute ex-min Chidambaram

Students break JNU gate in bid to march to min

The row over JNU VC Santishree Dhulipudi Pandit's alleged casteist remarks escalated into a two-hour clash with police as students broke open the varsity's triple-locked main gate and attempted to march towards the education ministry, leading to detentions and injuries. TNN

City's ferocious dog breed policy on hold

Regulation of "ferocious dog breeds" in Bengaluru is on hold as authorities await draft recommendations from the five municipal corporations. The issue stems from a March 2024 govt notice which identified 24 dog breeds as dangerous. **P 6**

CBI files fresh FIR against Anil Ambani

CBI has filed a fresh FIR against Anil Ambani and RCoM on a Bank of Baroda's complaint that it allegedly lost over Rs 2,220 cr after loans were siphoned off through shell firms and related-party deals hiding the telecom's true condition. **P 12**

India, Israel upgrade ties; PM backs Gaza peace plan

'Humanity Can't Become Victim Of Conflict'

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India and Israel upgraded what PM Narendra Modi described as a time-tested relationship to a special strategic partnership, announced a new NSA-led partnership in critical and emerging technologies and reaffirmed commitment to their long-standing defence cooperation after a bilateral meeting between Modi and his counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu.

►**EDIT: I For I**

As they signed 16 MoUs/agreements, India and Israel also committed to an early finalisation of a mutually beneficial free trade agreement they are currently discussing.

Modi said terror has no place in the world, and while backing Gaza Peace Plan, stressed that "humanity must never become a victim of conflict". He emphasised peace and stability in West Asia is directly linked to India's security interests. "From the very beginning, we have supported dialogue and peaceful resolution of issues. This is the call of Global South and of humanity as a whole."

►**'Peaceful dialogue', P 8**

16 MOUs AND PACTS SIGNED

PM Modi pays homage at Yad Vashem, World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, in Jerusalem

- Modi-Netanyahu meet results **in over 20 outcomes,** including signing of 16 MoUs/agreements spreading over areas like AI, education, horizon scanning, culture, labour mobility and geophysical exploration
- PM Modi says **'two countries will pursue joint development, production and transfer of technology in defence'**
- Both nations **agree to move forward** with 'renewed momentum' on **India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor and India-Israel-UAE-USA** (I2U2)
- Modi & Netanyahu **condemn cross-border terror,** including Pahalgam, Red Fort and Oct 7 Hamas attacks

SC seeks experts for panel on Aravalis; mining ban to continue

New Delhi: SC asked the environment ministry and other stakeholders on Thursday to suggest names of domain experts for the committee to be tasked with defining the Aravalli hills and ranges, and observed that only lawful mining would be allowed in the region.

►**In Raj, Aravalis simply can't be measured: Other bk, P 5**

The top court, on Dec 29, had taken note of the outcry over the new definition of Aravalis and kept in abeyance its Nov 20 order accepting a uniform definition of the hills and ranges. It had also put all mining on hold.

On Thursday, a bench of CJI Surya Kant and Justices Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi extended its earlier stay order on mining for the time being. AGENCIES

►**'Firm had permit', P 8**

SC bans NCERT book over 'judicial corruption' chapter

Court: Circulation Will Invite Consequences

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New Delhi: Supreme Court on Thursday banned the Class 8 social science textbook that had a section on corruption in judiciary, prohibited its circulation in all forms and asked the school education secretary and NCERT chairperson to show cause why contempt proceedings not be initiated against them despite the Centre tendering an unconditional and unqualified apology for the fiasco.

The second day of hearing in the case saw solicitor general Tushar Mehta, right at the outset, apologising for "the unpardonable mistake" committed by two persons who authored the book and said the govt has taken a decision to permanently bar them from involvement in preparation of any textbook.

SC, however, said that it would not accept the apology at this stage and would inquire whether there was a deliberate and calculated design to denigrate the institution and harm its reputation.

►**Copies to be seized, P 12**

GOVT APOLOGISES IN TOP COURT

- **PM Modi is learned to have expressed unhappiness** at lapse. 'What are we teaching...' he's reported to have asked at Cabinet meet
- Edu minister Dharmendra Pradhan offers unconditional apology. Affirms respect for judiciary, promises to fix accountability, **act against those who drafted chapter**
- NCERT says e-version of textbook was 'not uploaded', 32 physical copies were sold and majority have been recalled
- **Chapter to be rewritten** in consultation with appropriate authorities and **made available from 2026-27 session**
- **Tighter review mechanisms** for future textbooks being examined, officials say

HC warns of contempt for slandering judiciary

Allahabad HC has warned social media users of strict contempt action for online abuse directed at the judiciary that "goes beyond the defence of fair comment or informed criticism of a judgment". HC said the remarks cross the line of permissible free speech. "We do wish to remind the public to be cautious in future, because words that are most unambiguously contumacious circulate on the social media," HC said. TNN

Several Pak soldiers killed, captured: Af

Afghanistan attacked Pakistani forces Thursday and claimed to have killed and captured dozens of soldiers in retaliation of deadly air strikes days earlier. The offensive at multiple points along the frontier follows a series of border clashes and Pakistani strikes on Afghanistan in recent months. "In response to repeated violations by Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani military bases and military installations," Taliban govt spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said. **Other bk, P 7**

Internal reservation bill gets governor's nod; K'taka govt to fill over 56k vacancies

Bengaluru: In a bittersweet moment for the Siddaramaiah govt, the controversial internal reservation bill has received the assent of governor Thaawar Chand Gehlot even as the govt Thursday decided to fill more than 56,000 of 2.8 lakh vacancies in the state government in the next 30 days.

This comes with a caveat: The govt's decision will be subject to the final verdict of the Karnataka HC in the two cases challenging Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions and of Appointments or Posts in the Services under the State) Act, 2022, and The Karnataka Scheduled Castes (sub-categorisation in reservation) act 2025.

The HC has provided "conditional approval" in the case of reservation of seats and appointments to posts. Appointments or promotions by the state government under the new matrix should expressly state they are subject to the outcome of the cases pending against the increased reservation quota. Another HC bench has stayed the hiked quota for SCs and STs.

"As a result of this, the govt will call for filling 56,432 posts under the old quota of 50%, including 15% for SCs and 3% for STs, with enhanced quota of 2% for SCs and 4% to STs kept in the reserve subject to the HC final verdict," said state law minister HK Patil. TNN

►**Quota 56%, Other Bk, P 2**

State govt approves Cauvery Stage VI

Govt approved the ₹6,939cr Cauvery Stage VI project to supply six TMC of drinking water to Shivarama Karanth and Kempegowda layouts and eight urban local bodies (ULBs) around Bengaluru. Four TMC has been earmarked for BDA layouts and two for ULBs. **Other Bk, P 2**

No extra charge for air booking tweaks in 48 hrs

Airlines will now provide a "look-in option" for a period of 48 hours after booking a ticket during which a passenger can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except fare difference, if the departure date is at least 7 and 15 days hence for domestic and international flights, respectively. As part of DGCA's revised ticket norms, airlines will need to ensure refunds within 14 days and they will no longer be allowed to levy any charge for a name correction being made within 24 hours of the booking. **P 12**

Social media cos must pay creators fairly: Vaishnaw

New Delhi: Information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said Thursday social media platforms should compensate creators of the content they use for earning billions in profit, reports **Manash Gohain**.

"Social media platforms must also share revenue in a fair way with the people who are creating content, whether it is news persons, conventional media, creators in far-flung areas, influencers, or professors and researchers disseminating their work using the platforms... there has to be a fair share of revenue with the people who are creating the content," Vaishnaw said at the Storyboard 18 Digital News Publishers Association Conclave.

> The nature of the internet has changed... today it has become a powerful media outlet, where, like media, the platforms must take responsibility... for what they are publishing. Entire society is built upon trust in institutions...core tenet of trust is under threat
>
> —Ashwini Vaishnaw
> I&B MINISTER

►**Eroding trust, P 8**

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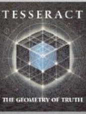

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Forced Service Charge Proves Costly For Bar

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CONSUMER IS KING

Bengaluru: Service charge dragged an RR Nagar bar into a consumer dispute when a 27-year-old man objected to an automatic charge levied on his food bill. The II additional district consumer disputes redressal commission termed the levy an unfair trade practice and ordered a full refund with compensation.

The saga began on the evening of Aug 18, 2025, when Harsha Prabhakar, a resident of Chikkalsandra, along with his friends, visited Stories Bar & Kitchen in Rajarajeshwari Nagar. He was presented with a bill totalling Rs 3,443, including an arbitrarily added 10% service charge amounting to Rs 307. This imposition was made without any prior, explicit, or informed consent from Prabhakar, transforming what should have been a voluntary gratuity into a compulsory levy.

Shocked by this unwarranted charge, Prabhakar immediately objected to its inclusion and explicitly requested its removal from the bill. However, the restaurant, with what he described as brazen disregard for consumer autonomy, adamantly refused to accede to his request, stating that it levied a 10% service charge. When he argued that service charge was optional in nature, the staff disregarded his contention and asked him to clear the bill.

Left with no recourse, Prabhakar was compelled to pay the full bill under protest. He alleged that this act constituted a restrictive trade practice by imposing an unjustified cost and condition. The payment was ultimately processed through UPI and cash.

Prabhakar issued a legal notice, dated Aug 19, 2025, to the eatery. When there was no response, he filed a consumer complaint on Sept 17, 2025. He also contended that the restaurant's continued practice of auto-levying service charge posed an ongoing threat to consumer rights.

Notice was served on Stories Bar & Kitchen, but it failed to appear and was placed ex parte. After going through all the evidence, the commission noted that the documentary evidence placed on record also remained unchallenged.

The commission noted that the 2022 Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) guidelines clearly prohibit hotels and restaurants from imposing service charge in bills and allow consumers to file complaints in case of violation.

Unfair trade practice

The commission held that the restaurant had indulged in an unfair trade practice by levying the service charge in the bill issued to Prabhakar. The restaurant did not contest the case or demonstrate how it did not commit any unfair trade practice. During the oral arguments, counsel for Prabhakar cited the March 28, 2025 judgment of the Delhi high court on petitions by the National Restaurant Association of India and the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India against the Union of India.

The court held that CCPA is fully empowered to issue binding guidelines under the Consumer Protection Act, 2019. It ruled that a service charge or tip is purely voluntary and cannot be made compulsory, and that automatic levy in a coercive manner violates consumer rights and amounts to an unfair trade practice.

It also clarified that merely displaying a service charge on the menu does not bind consumers, and any tip must be left to the customer's discretion. The court upheld the validity of the CCPA guidelines and directed all restaurants to comply with them.

On Feb 11, the commission bench ordered the restaurant to refund the service charge with 18% interest from the payment date till realisation. It also ordered the eatery to pay Rs 5,000 as compensation and Rs 2,000 as litigation costs.

Decision on phone ban after discussions: Min

Bengaluru: School education minister Madhu Bangarappa said Thursday a decision on banning mobile phones for under-16 children in the state will be made after consulting schoolchildren, their parents and experts.

Expressing concern over the role of parents in children becoming addicted to phones, the minister said, "In today's system, parents themselves hand over mobiles to their children to keep them quiet or stop them from crying. That's where the problem starts. Children are getting distracted by mobiles and social media, which is not just a problem in our state but across the country."

Speaking on the sidelines of the National Science Day event at Jawaharlal Nehru Planetarium, Bangarappa said an initiative, "Put down the mobile, pick up a book," is being planned on the instructions of chief minister Siddaramaiah. **TOI** reported details about this initiative last week.

The issue of mobile ban in schools is in the discussion phase, and an appropriate decision will be made soon under the CM's guidance, the minister added. TNN

Yellow Line frequency up from 10 to 9 mins

Bengaluru: From Friday, Namma Metro's Yellow Line will run trains at a frequency of nine minutes during peak hours. This will replace the existing peak-hour frequency of 10 minutes as an eighth train will start plying between Bommasandra and RV Road stations.

There will be only one-minute improvement in the line's peak-hour frequency, but its non-peak-hour frequency will improve from the existing 18 minutes to 14. The eighth trainset was inducted by Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Ltd (BMRCL) a few days ago but was used as a standby train to deal with emergency requirements. With no trains expected next month, commuters and netizens had demanded that BMRCL prioritise the running frequency. Former Infosys CFO TV Mohandas Pai Wednesday termed the decision to keep a train on standby cruel.

As the city's wait for more Metro lines continues, BMRCL MD J Ravishankar Thursday inspected the upcoming Blue Line between Kasturinagar and Kodigehalli Cross and urged teams to accelerate viaduct completion to minimise traffic disruption along ORR. TNN

11 held for abducting, assaulting film director over financial row

Times News Network

Bengaluru: Eleven people have been arrested for allegedly abducting a film director, brutally assaulting him and robbing him of gold ornaments and cash in a case linked to financial dispute over an under-production Kannada film.

The complainant, Anish TA, 31, a native of Tamil Nadu residing in Mumbai, had directed the Kannada film Jeevanada Bashe, post-production work of which is pending. The arrested accused are Ashirwad, Sujan, Sanjay, Lakshmi Narayan, Shahid, Aishwarya, Rehan, Arif, Dhruva, Charan, and Aslam.

According to police, Lakshmi Narayan invested Rs 6-8 lakh in the film. Ashirwad worked as Anish's assistant, while Aishwarya acted in the film. Before completing post-production, Anish shifted from Bengaluru to Mumbai, leaving investors disappointed.

Police said Narayan was upset over Anish's move. At the same time, Anish and Ashirwad were embroiled in a financial dispute of Rs 2.5 lakh, which Ashirwad had allegedly borrowed from him. When Anish demanded repayment, Ashirwad allegedly threatened him and refused to return the money.

A few months ago, Anish filed a police complaint and issued a legal notice to Ashirwad. Earlier this month, Anish told Aishwarya he wanted to sell his SUV. She allegedly informed Ashirwad, who asked her to tell Anish that a friend was interested in purchasing the vehicle.

Anish then drove from Mumbai to Bengaluru in the SUV. He met Aishwarya and her friend Shahid at a coffee outlet in Indiranagar. Later, on the pretext of inspecting the vehicle, he was taken by Shahid's friend to a garage. From there, Anish was allegedly taken to a house in Byadarahalli.

Police said 5-6 persons, including Ashirwad, assaulted him with cricket stumps and hockey sticks before robbing him of a gold bracelet, a ring, and Rs 30,000 in cash.

₹1.1cr GOLD STOLEN

Gold jewellery, weighing 816 grams and valued at Rs 1.1 crore, was stolen from a residence in Hebbal.

The complainant, Anis Fatima, who resides on the first floor of a multi-storey residential building, initially suspected the domestic help and the building's security guard. However, preliminary probe ruled out their role in the theft. Instead, police suspect the ornaments were stolen by someone in the family. One person has been detained and efforts are on to identify others.

COPS ASK OWNERS TO GIVE FOREIGN TENANT DETAILS

Police have launched a special drive to identify foreign nationals illegally residing in the city, with landlords told to mandatorily share details of their tenants with authorities.

All police station officers and personnel are checking visa validity, passport details and registration status with the Foreigners' Regional Registration Office.

Police said inspections were carried out over the past few days via field verification and live monitoring. House owners were directed to provide details of foreigners residing on their premises to jurisdictional police stations. Officials said the drive included scrutiny of foreigners suspected of unlawful activities. TNN

Veer Bahadur Singh Purvanchal University Jaunpur 222003 (UP)
A State University established under Uttar Pradesh State University Act 1973
[illegible]

Case over comments on min

Bengaluru: A complaint has been filed with cybercrime police over alleged derogatory social media comments targeting home minister G Parameshwara and his family. According to complainant Umesh BN, a Kolar-focused Facebook news page recently shared a legislature session video on Feb 2, after which several users posted objectionable remarks against the minister and his relatives. TNN

B'luru's air quality index hits 100, but no cheer for this ton

Min Khandre Fastens Onus On Civic Bodies

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Photo for representation

Bengaluru: "Not another gas chamber like Delhi," environment minister Eshwar Khandre said Thursday, as he directed Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) to issue notices to the Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) and other local bodies if the air quality index in the city exceeds 100 in a day. He said failure to act would invite legal consequences.

Amid concerns over the city's worsening air quality, the minister said he would call a meeting of all 28 city legislators under the chairmanship of deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar to chalk out measures to address air, water, and noise pollution.

Sources said the renewed focus followed concerns raised by Rajajinagar MLA Suresh Kumar during a recent legislature session. Though the minister had earlier sought time to respond, a review meeting was not convened for nearly a year. On Thursday, Khandre reviewed the issue with officials.

Officials informed the minister air quality is monitored at 11 fixed stations and 11 mobile units across Bengaluru. "The air quality suffers in Dec and Jan due to smog. This is worsened by road dust. Compared to the AQI of this period, there is a 5% to 6% improvement now," one official said. The city's AQI on Thursday stood at 98 (satisfactory).

Officials said areas such as Veterinary College Junction near Hebbal (180), Jayanagar (143), Silk Board Junction (140), Mysuru Road (137), Kengeri (132), and Jigani (112) are among the worst affected.

Referring to a 2023 study by National Institute of Advanced Studies, officials said 31.8% of pollutants in Bengaluru's air are due to windblown dust. "About 51% of the pollutants are due to road dust, and the remaining are from old generator sets and unregulated construction activities. Even though vehicular emissions contribute to bad air quality, the percentage dramatically reduced due to stringent regulations under Bharat VI rules," an official added. The minister directed the civic authorities to deploy mechanised sweepers to reduce road dust.

The BJP's Suresh Kumar said, "Pulmonologists repeatedly point out that kids are increasingly developing lung fibrosis, and a study by the Jayadeva doctors said air pollution as one of the major risk factors for premature cardiac arrests. The officials have acknowledged that AQI is crossing 100 on several occasions."

Noting that the Central Pollution Control Board categorises AQI above 100 as "moderate", Khandre directed, "If AQI exceeds 100, then the jurisdictional local bodies, including GBA, should be issued notices. It will be brought under control within the stipulated time frame."

The minister noted that not all wastewater generated is being treated at treatment plants. "Of the 1,800 MLD of wastewater, nearly 60% to 70% is treated. We need to check where the rest is discharged," the minister said, seeking a report in a month.

Noting that Bengaluru is experiencing high temperatures, the minister conceded the trend to global warming and climate change, while stressing the need for local interventions. Increasing green cover, tightening dust-control norms, and strengthening enforcement under the Air Act and Water Act will form part of the strategy.

Activists called for regulation of LED boards beaming high-intensity lights. "There are no standards on the luminous intensity; KSPCB hasn't acted against such glaring boards. It is time the govt acted," an activist said.

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY

- Environment minister Eshwar Khandre directed KSPCB to issue notices to GBA and local bodies if AQI crosses 100, warning of legal consequences for inaction
- Bengaluru's AQI stood at 98 on Thursday
- Officials cited 2023 study showing 31.8% of pollutants from windblown dust and 51% from road dust
- The minister called for green cover expansion and stricter enforcement under air and water Acts, while activists sought regulation of high-intensity LED boards
- The renewed action followed concerns raised by Rajajinagar MLA Suresh Kumar in the legislature; though a response was earlier deferred, Khandre reviewed the issue with officials Thursday
- Officials noted winter smog and road dust worsened air quality in Dec-Jan, though levels show a 5-6% improvement now; pulmonologists have warned of rising lung issues and linked air pollution to premature cardiac risks

Online demand & payment must for textbook supply

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Bengaluru: The department of pre-university (PU) education has changed norms on printing and distribution of textbooks for private aided and unaided PU colleges, making advance payment and online demand submission mandatory from the 2026-27 academic year.

Under the new guidelines, educational institutions must submit their textbook requirements class-wise, subject-wise, and title-wise through the SATS (Student Achievement Tracking System) portal. Printing and supply of textbooks will begin only after the prescribed amount, fixed by the Karnataka Textbook Society (KTBS), is paid in advance through an online payment gateway.

The decision to change rules followed observations that during previous academic years, only around 40% of the total student strength in PU colleges sought textbooks through official channels. Despite this, books were printed based on broader estimates, leading to a large number of unsold copies being stored in warehouses.

Officials noted that many PU students opted for NCERT textbooks available in the open market instead of purchasing them through colleges. As a result, surplus stock created financial problems for KTBS. To avoid wastage and unnecessary financial burden, the state govt has decided to adopt the same demand-based system already followed for private schools from classes 1 to 10. "Until now, we were not getting the exact requirements of students. So, sometimes what they required was not available for purchase, and in some cases, printing was in excess of demand. The new process has been initiated for aided/unaided PU colleges so that actual requirements can be obtained and the same printed and provided," said Bharath Selvan, director, PU education.

HOW SYSTEM WORKS

- Private aided and unaided PU colleges must submit textbook demand through SATS in advance
- Printing to be undertaken only after online payment made to KTBS
- If college doesn't need textbooks, principal must submit mandatory zero demand certificate
- Department will upgrade SATS software to enable PU-level demand submission
- KTBS to handle printing and distribution strictly as per confirmed demand
- All textbooks to be made available before the start of 2026-27 academic year

GBA chief admits to problems in waste collection timings

Bengaluru: Complaints on several issues, including garbage collection and footpath encroachments, poured in at a public interaction presided over by Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) chief commissioner Maheshwar Rao on Thursday.

He assured the complainants that at least 30% of the complaints would be resolved within 2-3 days. "We are planning to do a follow-up every month. If an issue is not resolved and the complaint is repeated, we will ask the relevant official to report on why it is not done," he said.

KEEPING CITY CLEAN

The GBA chief acknowledged problems related to garbage collection timings. "People unable to hand over waste to autos are throwing it. We will look at resolving this," he said. Some residents recalled a similar initiative conducted in Dec 2024. "Though our complaint was followed up promptly with a written reply, the issue was not resolved. The mechanism of receiving and processing complaints is great, but there is no execution in many cases," a complainant told **TOI**, adding that her issue from 2024 was yet to be resolved.

Gayathri Ashok from New Thippasandra raised the issue of poorly maintained parks and playgrounds. "Playgrounds with no lighting are creating a security threat for nearby residents," she said. TNN

Big buzz, lean plate: Awareness about protein up, but intake lags in B'luru

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Bengaluru: Protein is everywhere in the city's diet talk — but not on enough plates. Even as awareness rises about the importance of protein intake, consistent consumption remains low.

WORLD PROTEIN DAY

To fill this gap, Karnataka Poultry Farmers and Breeders Association (KPFBA), which represents poultry farmers and breeders, recently launched an awareness campaign ahead of World Protein Day, which falls on Friday (Feb 27). "Protein deficiency is a problem across the country and even in our state. One gram per kilogram of body weight is the recommended protein intake, but we do not see a conscious shift towards nutritional consumption among consumers. Nobody measures their nutrition before consumption. Chicken is the best source of lean protein and egg is a cheaper source of protein...we want people to understand that," said Sreejith S, executive secretary of the association.

He pointed out that even among regular meat eaters, intake is often irregular. "Some people eat a lot of meat on one or two days of the week, and that does not work in the long term. Hence, we want to create awareness beyond the source. We want vegetarians and non-vegetarians to fulfil their daily requirements through a variety of sources."

When **TOI** checked whether Bengaluru's dieticians and nutritionists had observed similar patterns, they said that while awareness has increased about the importance of protein consumption, this has not translated into consistent consumption.

"There are more people talking about protein in the city now, and we are seeing an increased addition of eggs, paneer, Greek yoghurt, sprouts, and even protein supplements to diets. A lot of it is also fuelled by people being more fitness-oriented. However, many people are not consistent with meeting their daily requirements across all meals," said Aayesha Parveen, consultant nutritionist, Kinder Women's Hospital.

Maintaining healthy ratio

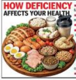
Experts said that this deficiency primarily exists because Indian diets are carbohydrate-heavy. "We also notice that for people staying in paying guest accommodations or hostels, or for those highly dependent on outside food regularly, meeting protein requirements becomes even more challenging," said Edwina Raj, head of services-clinical nutrition & dietetics, Aster CMI Hospital.

She suggested adding at least one source of protein, such as paneer, dal, tofu, sprouts, meat, or egg, with every meal. However, she cautioned that protein does not work in silos. "Protein-fibre ratio should be maintained along with the consumption of healthy fats for good gut health. Protein also needs supporting nutrients and energy to spare its action for tissue and muscle building," she added.

For those who struggle to meet their requirements through food, dietitians suggest plant-based or whey protein supplements as a practical add-on. They underlined that supplements are not only for gym-goers, but warned that powders should not replace regular meals or be consumed in excess.

Cost, however, remains a sticking point for many consumers trying to increase their protein intake. "As a very active individual who works out every day and plays sports, I aim for about 2 grams of protein per kg of body weight, which comes to roughly 140 grams a day. If I break it down to eight eggs (about Rs 50), 500 grams of chicken (around Rs 100), and one scoop of whey protein (around Rs 85), it adds up to Rs 235 a day and over Rs 7,000 a month," said Chandu M, a resident of Basavanagudi.

HOW DEFICIENCY AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH



- Low energy and fatigue
- Hair, skin and nail issues
- Weakened immunity
- Loss of muscle mass and strength
- Slower healing and recovery
- Impaired growth in children
- Accelerated muscle loss in older adults
- Metabolic slowdown

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UTTARAKHAND RISING

ROBUST TOURISM INFRA, STRONGER ECONOMY

UNDER THE ABLE LEADERSHIP OF PM NARENDRA MODI AND THE GUIDANCE OF CM PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI, UTTARAKHAND IS ENTERING A NEW PHASE OF GROWTH, WHERE STRONGER CONNECTIVITY ACROSS AIR, RAIL AND ROAD IS OPENING THE DOORS TO ITS HILLS, TEMPLES AND TOWNS LIKE NEVER BEFORE

"Our vision is to make Uttarakhand a year-round global tourism destination by strengthening connectivity, promoting adventure and spiritual circuits, and empowering our villages through initiatives like homestays. Every road, railway, ropeway and policy reform is aimed at creating sustainable livelihoods while preserving the cultural and natural heritage of Devbhoomi. Tourism is not just an industry for us—it is a key pillar of economic growth and inclusive development for the people of the state."

-**Pushkar Singh Dhami**, Chief Minister

Homestays fuel rural tourism growth

Across the hills of Uttarakhand, homestays are transforming village homes into gateways of opportunity, strengthening both tourism and rural livelihoods

Homestays in Uttarakhand are emerging as a powerful engine of tourism-led rural development, offering visitors an authentic Himalayan experience while creating sustainable income opportunities for local communities. From the serene villages of Kumaon to the remote hamlets of Garhwal, homestays are allowing travellers to live amidst nature, culture and tradition rather than just visit as tourists.

Under the state's Homestay Policy, primarily driven by the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grah Awaas Vikas Yojana, the government has encouraged residents to convert part of their homes into tourist accommodations. The policy provides financial incentives, simplified registration processes and promotional support to ensure that rural families can participate directly in the tourism economy. By reducing barriers to entry and offering structured guidelines, the initiative has made it easier for villagers to become stakeholders in Uttarakhand's growing tourism sector.

The impact has been significant. Homestays generate employment not only for homeowners but also for local youth engaged as guides, drivers, cooks and cultural performers. They promote the consumption of local produce, traditional cuisine and handicrafts, thereby strengthening village-level micro-economies. Moreover, homestays help distribute tourist footfall beyond established hubs like Nainital, Mussoorie and Rishikesh, bringing attention to lesser-known destinations.

Importantly, this model encourages responsible and sustainable tourism. Visitors gain insight into local customs and environmental practices, fostering mutual respect and cultural exchange.

Homestays generate employment not only for homeowners but also for local youth engaged as guides, drivers, cooks and cultural performers. They promote the consumption of local produce, traditional cuisine and handicrafts, thereby strengthening village-level micro-economies

Uttarakhand is steadily transforming its tourism landscape through a series of ambitious connectivity projects. From ropeways in the high Himalayas to expressways, rail corridors and expanded air services, the state is investing in infrastructure that makes travel faster, safer and more convenient. These projects are not only easing pilgrimages and holidays but are also strengthening the local economy by increasing tourist footfall across seasons.

ROPEWAYS MAKING PILGRIMAGE EASIER

One of the most significant developments is the Kedarnath Ropeway Project, which aims to connect Sonprayag to Kedarnath. Once completed, the ropeway will drastically reduce travel time to the shrine, offering a safer and more comfortable alternative to the long trek.

Similarly, the Hemkund Sahib Ropeway Project is expected to transform access to the high-altitude Sikh pilgrimage site. The ropeway will make the journey smoother, particularly for elderly devotees and families. Closer to Dehradun, the Dehradun-Mussoorie Ropeway Project is set to significantly cut travel time between the two destinations while reducing traffic congestion on the existing hill road. This project is expected to enhance Mussoorie's appeal as a quick weekend getaway. The Gaurikund Devi Temple Ropeway Project is another example of how improved access to religious sites is encouraging more visitors while reducing strain on steep trekking routes.

PICS: DIPR, UTTARAKHAND GOVERNMENT

CM Pushkar Singh Dhami gifting 'Gram of Uttarakhand' to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

RAIL CONNECTIVITY REACHING THE HILLS

The Rishikesh-Karnaprayag Railway Project is one of the most ambitious rail undertakings in the region. Once operational, it will connect several important towns in Garhwal to the national railway network. This will not only benefit pilgrims heading to the Char Dham but also adventure and leisure tourists exploring the interior hill destinations. Improved rail access means reduced travel fatigue and a more reliable way to reach remote areas.

CM Pushkar Singh Dhami inspects Rishikesh-Karnaprayag Rail Project Site

FASTER TRAINS CONNECTING MAJOR CITIES

The introduction of Vande Bharat trains between Dehradun and Delhi, as well as Dehradun and Lucknow, has further improved accessibility. These semi-high-speed trains provide a comfortable and time-efficient option for tourists, making short trips to Uttarakhand more convenient than ever before.

STRONGER ROADS FOR ALL-WEATHER TRAVEL

The Char Dham All-Weather Road Project is designed to provide smoother and more reliable connectivity to Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. By widening and strengthening key stretches, the project aims to reduce seasonal disruptions and enhance road safety. In addition, the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway is set to significantly shorten travel time between the national capital and Uttarakhand's capital city.

A NEW ERA FOR TOURISM

Together, these projects reflect a coordinated effort to modernise Uttarakhand's transport network. Improved connectivity is not only making travel easier but is also supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities, and extending the tourism season beyond traditional peaks. With better roads, railways, ropeways and air services, Uttarakhand is positioning itself as a more accessible and sustainable destination, allowing visitors to experience its natural beauty and spiritual heritage with greater comfort and safety.

Uttarakhand is upgrading roads, railways, ropeways and air links to improve pilgrimage and tourism access, boost safety, reduce travel time, and strengthen the local economy year-round

EXPANDING AIR CONNECTIVITY ACROSS THE STATE

Under the UDAN Yojana, helicopter services have enhanced connectivity to various hill destinations, especially during pilgrimage seasons. These services reduce long travel hours and provide scenic aerial access to remote regions.

Meanwhile, Dehradun's Jolly Grant Airport is undergoing expansion, with plans to develop it into an international airport in the future. This move is expected to attract more domestic and international tourists, strengthening Uttarakhand's position as a global travel destination.

"Uttarakhand possesses a natural spiritual strength that sets it apart, and the devotion, heritage and purity of this Devbhoomi give it an identity unmatched anywhere else. The state is entering a phase of remarkable possibilities and with firm resolve, it can establish itself as one of the world's leading centres of spirituality. Along with this spiritual potential, Uttarakhand is also emerging as a beautiful wedding destination. To benefit from the 'Wed in India' vision, the state can develop select locations equipped with world-class facilities, allowing people from across the country to celebrate their special occasions in the serene and divine environment of Uttarakhand."

-**Narendra Modi,** Prime Minister

Faith meets adventure

Adi Kailash rises as faith and endurance hub after PM's visit

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the Adi Kailash region and offered prayers at this revered site. Adi Kailash is often described as the 'sacred twin of Kailash Mansarovar.' At its base lies the tranquil Parvati Kund, a site of immense spiritual significance in Hindu mythology.

These high-altitude destinations are now emerging as must-visit landmarks—drawing not only pilgrims seeking blessings but also adventurers and nature enthusiasts. Adi Kailash and Parvati Kund are poised to become icons of sustainable tourism, where culture and ecology come together in harmony. Improved road connectivity and homestays in villages like Gunji, Nabi, and Kuti have opened the region to wider audiences. With growing interest, UTDB is reimagining the area as not just a site of devotion but also a hub for wellness, adventure, and immersive cultural experiences.

Adventure tourism paradise

From snow-covered slopes to rushing rivers and soaring skies, Uttarakhand is redefining adventure tourism in India with experiences that thrill, challenge and inspire

Pushkar Singh Dhami, CM; Dheeraj Singh Garbyal, tourism secretary and other dignitaries flag off high-altitude marathon

Uttarakhand is fast emerging as one of India's most exciting adventure tourism destinations, attracting thrill-seekers, nature lovers and sports enthusiasts throughout the year. With its snow-covered peaks, powerful rivers, alpine meadows and scenic valleys, the state offers a natural setting perfectly suited for high-adrenaline experiences and outdoor exploration. "Uttarakhand's tourism story is being rewritten with innovation, inclusivity and sustainability at its heart. From enhanced connectivity and immersive adventure experiences to cultural celebrations and community-led homestays, we are committed to showcasing the best of Devbhoomi to the world. Our focus remains on creating memorable experiences for visitors while ensuring lasting economic benefits for local communities and preserving the pristine beauty of the Himalayas," says Dheeraj Singh Garbyal, CEO, Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB).

Tehri lake paragliding

FESTIVALS FUELING ADVENTURE TOURISM

The Tehri Lake Festival has become a major highlight on Uttarakhand's adventure calendar. Organised on the expansive Tehri Lake, the festival features water sports such as jet skiing, kayaking, speed boating and banana boat rides. It transforms the calm waters into a lively arena of action, drawing tourists and water sports enthusiasts from across the country.

Skiing in Auli

The Nayar Valley Adventure Sports Festival is another initiative promoting adventure tourism in the state. Set in the picturesque Nayar Valley, the festival encourages activities like trekking, rock climbing and camping while also promoting eco-tourism and local participation. It showcases the region's natural beauty while creating opportunities for rural tourism.

During winter, Auli becomes the epicentre of snow sports with the National Skiing Championship & Winter Carnival. Known for its pristine slopes and stunning Himalayan views, Auli attracts professional athletes and tourists alike. The championship strengthens Uttarakhand's position as one of India's leading skiing destinations.

Valley of Flowers

THRILL ACTIVITIES ACROSS THE STATE

Beyond festivals, Uttarakhand offers adventure experiences throughout the year. River rafting in Rishikesh continues to be a major attraction for adrenaline seekers. Trekking trails such as Kedarkantha, Valley of Flowers and Har Ki Dun draw hikers from across India and abroad.

Paragliding in places like Pithoragarh and Naukuchiatal offers breathtaking aerial views, while camping amidst Himalayan landscapes provides a peaceful yet adventurous escape. For those seeking an intense thrill, bungee jumping in Rishikesh remains one of the most popular activities. With its diverse terrain and expanding adventure infrastructure, Uttarakhand is steadily carving its identity as a premier adventure tourism destination in India.

CHAR DHAM YATRA: A confluence of faith and nature

Nestled in the majestic Himalayas, the Char Dham Yatra stands as Uttarakhand's most revered spiritual journey, blending deep faith with breathtaking natural beauty

The Char Dham Yatra in Uttarakhand is one of India's most sacred pilgrimages, drawing lakhs of devotees every year to the Himalayan shrines of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. Set against breathtaking mountain landscapes, the Yatra represents both deep spiritual faith and an extraordinary journey through nature.

THE FOUR SACRED SHRINES

Yamunotri, dedicated to the Goddess Yamuna, marks the beginning of the pilgrimage. Surrounded by rugged peaks and thermal springs, it symbolises purity and devotion.

Gangotri, the origin of the holy River Ganga, is devoted to Goddess Ganga. Pilgrims visit the temple to offer prayers and seek blessings along the banks of the sacred river.

Kedarnath, dedicated to Lord Shiva, stands majestically amid snow-clad mountains. It is one of the twelve Jyotirlingas and holds immense spiritual significance for devotees across the country.

Badrinath, dedicated to Lord Vishnu, completes the circuit. Situated along the Alaknanda River, it is an important Vaishnavite shrine and a symbol of salvation and spiritual liberation.

In recent years, the Winter Char Dham circuit has gained importance, transforming the traditionally summer pilgrimage into a year-round spiritual journey

BEYOND THE DHAMS: NATURE AND DEVOTION

During the Yatra, pilgrims often explore nearby destinations that enhance both spiritual and scenic experiences.

The Valley of Flowers National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, attracts visitors with its vibrant alpine blooms and rare Himalayan flora.

Hemkund Sahib, a revered Sikh pilgrimage site located at a high altitude, is also frequently visited by devotees and trekkers. Surrounded by snow-covered peaks and a glacial lake, it offers a serene yet powerful spiritual atmosphere.

THE WINTER CHAR DHAM CIRCUIT

In recent years, the Winter Char Dham circuit has gained importance, transforming the traditionally summer pilgrimage into a year-round spiritual journey. When the main shrines close during peak winter, the deities are ceremonially shifted to their winter seats.

Gangotri's idol is moved to Mukhba in the Harsil region, allowing devotees to continue worship in a lower-altitude setting. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also visited Mukhba and offered prayers, highlighting the importance of winter pilgrimage and encouraging year-round tourism in Uttarakhand.

Yoga enthusiasts meet in Rishikesh

Rishikesh is all set to welcome yoga enthusiasts from around the world as the International Yog Festival 2026 promises a week dedicated to holistic wellness and mindful living

The International Yog Festival will be organised from March 16 to 22, 2026, at the GMVN Ganga Resort in Muni Ki Reti, Rishikesh. Hosted by Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN), this year's festival promises to go beyond traditional yoga practices and evolve into a holistic celebration of physical, mental and lifestyle transformation.

Unlike previous editions that primarily focused on asanas, the upcoming festival will place special emphasis on mental health, sattvic diet and balanced living. The event aims to create a deeper understanding of yoga as a way of life rather than just a physical discipline. Along with immersive yoga sessions, participants will also experience the spirit of local culture and traditions.

Manaskhand Circuit: Kumaon's spiritual trail

The Manaskhand Circuit is a revival of faith, tradition, and architectural splendour under the eternal charm of the Himalayas

Uttarakhand, often called Devbhoomi or the Land of the Gods, is a treasure of temples and shrines that have shaped India's spiritual and cultural identity. While Bageshwar Temple, a part of Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission Project, has gained national and global recognition, the equally divine Kumaon temples have remained less explored. To bridge this gap, the Uttarakhand Government, under CM Pushkar Singh Dhami, has launched the Manaskhand Mandir Mala Mission—an ambitious initiative to rejuvenate Kumaon's ancient temples, strengthen their visibility, and preserve their timeless heritage.

UNEARTHING KUMAON'S HIDDEN SPIRITUAL TREASURES

In its first phase, 11 of the 48 selected temples are receiving infrastructure upgrades. The Manaskhand Circuit creates a spiritual trail connecting Kumaon's revered yet lesser-known temples. This initiative highlights the region's artistic and spiritual richness while placing it firmly on India's religious tourism map. • **Almora:** Jageshwar Mahadev, Chitai Golu Devta, Katarmal Sun Temple, Kasar Devi, and Nanda Devi. • **Pithoragarh:** Patal Bhuvaneshwar Cave Temple and Haat Kalika of Gangolihat. • **Bageshwar:** Baijnath and Bagnath Mahadev Temples. • **Champawat:** Purnagiri, Barahi Devi (Devidhura), and Baleshwar temples. • **Nainital:** Naina Devi Temple and Kainchi Dham. • **Udham Singh Nagar:** Chaiti Bala Sundari Temple.

A SPIRITUAL VOYAGE

The Manaskhand Circuit is more than a collection of temples; it revives forgotten traditions, architectural brilliance, and blends spirituality with cultural pride. For pilgrims, it becomes a journey of faith; for travellers, an immersion into history and nature. By developing temple clusters into a unified circuit, the mission envisions experiences comparable to the Char Dham while retaining Kumaon's identity.

Kumaon's temples stand out for their rustic beauty—wooden carvings, slate roofs, and stone courtyards that harmonise with the Himalayan landscape. The mission focuses on restoring structural integrity, conserving idols, reviving murals, and protecting inscriptions. Alongside, it seeks to preserve Kumaoni rituals, ensuring modern facilities do not dilute their spiritual character.

Text by Tanvi Datta

READER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

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SUMADHURA SOLACE

Fire official: Nearly 99% of buildings in pete localities don't have NOC

Narrow Lanes, Not Fire Incidents, Pose Bigger Hurdles In Accessing Sites: Officers

Rajiv Kalkod &
Jahnavi R | TNN

File photo

ON FIRE: Two 16,000-litre water tankers were deployed at Kumbarpet after embers flared up again in the congested area Thursday

Bengaluru: A day after the fire at the multi-storey building in Kumbarpet in Chickpet, embers flared up again after an internal wall collapsed Thursday morning, forcing the deployment of two 16,000-litre water tankers, said a fire official.

A senior fire and emergency services officer said nearly 99% of buildings around Avenue Road, Kumbarpet, Chickpet and adjoining localities do not have a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the department.

"The govt recently mandated NOC only for high-rise buildings above 21 metres by altering the previous 15-metre norm. Hundreds of buildings above 15 metres still pose risks in the vicinity, and all these buildings shall be made NOC-mandatory," he further said.

He added, "We never fear fighting fire; that is our duty and we are trained for it. But when we receive calls from these areas, we panic because of narrow lanes where fire tenders cannot move, illegally constructed floors, sub-standard electrical materials in commercial buildings, illegal godowns in basements, and iron grills on windows along the narrow staircases that block access."

Another officer highlighted the challenges in enforcement. "When we urge building owners for safety measures, they approach political functionaries or ministers, who direct us not to disturb them. This is how the system works," he rued.

Amid the operation, two personnel sustained minor burns on their hands. They were shifted to Victoria Hospital for treatment.

Dr Yogishwarappa CN, professor and head of the department of plastic surgery and burns at the hospital, said, "We treated them on an OPD basis with minor dressing and tablets. They were advised to rest (for recovery) until they feel well enough to work again."

Former Chickpet corporator AL Shivakumar said trade norms are also being flouted. "The exemption from NOC is largely for MSMEs in industrial areas, but all these pete areas are not industrial areas. While exemptions are given for activities like cloth manufacturing, here it is purely trade and piled-up stocks. Everyone must have a trade licence. If they have a GST number, they must also have a trade licence," he said.

GBA promises preventive measures, to set up panel

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> **We have been petitioning successive govts to develop infrastructure, but no interest has been shown. Given the daily footfall in lakhs, we need a mini-ambulance and mini-fire vehicle to be stationed here**
>
> SAJJAN RAJ MEHTA
> Trade activist

Bengaluru: A day after the blazing inferno, GBA appears to have woken up to long-ignored fire hazards in congested localities.

Chickpet, Balepet, Kumbarpet, Mamulpet, Nagarathpet and SP Road — part of old Bengaluru — have grown in a largely unregulated manner. Many roads, less than 40-feet wide, are choked with vehicles and see heavy pedestrian footfall, leaving little room for fire tenders or ambulances. Despite a fire in Aug 2025 in Nagarathpet that claimed five lives, little appears to have changed on the ground.

A senior GBA official said many buildings lack even fire extinguishers. "Transformers, electric poles and a web of overhead cables crowd the lanes, while shops stack wall-to-wall inflammable goods such as garments, cosmetics and electronics," he said.

GBA chief commissioner Maheshwar Rao said, "In the previous case (Aug 2025), we found the gutted building was facing violations and we took action against the owner. But now, we will take preventive measures to avoid such incidents in future."

GBA will constitute a committee led by the central city corporation's engineering team, to study structural faults and suggest corrective measures.

Rao added, "We are thinking of multiple options, including having a common water pipeline system in each complex, similar to apartments."

B'luru-Hyd rail journey may be faster from next month

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Bengaluru: Rail journey between Bengaluru and Hyderabad will be on a faster track by next month. In a significant boost, South Western Railway (SWR) commissioned the doubled 30-km stretch between Makajipalli and Dharmavaram in southern Andhra Pradesh.

Along with the doubling, the newly commissioned track will see a major speed upgrade after the commissioner of railway safety authorised the section for operation at a maximum speed of 110 kmph. In fact, the trial run was conducted at a maximum speed of 121 kmph, during which no abnormal peaks were observed in the oscillation monitoring system.

With commissioning of this stretch, the entire doubling project between Penukonda and Dharmavaram was completed with the highest sanctioned speed of 130 kmph. The project involved construction of 66 minor bridges, 15 road underbridges, 1 foot overbridge, and development of 1 station yard comprising 5 lines.

Additionally, speed upgrade of the stretch between Yelahanka in north Bengaluru and Dharmavaram towards southern Andhra Pradesh to 130 kmph will be completed by March.

The 161-km corridor is expected to benefit several high-occupancy trains, including the Yeshwantpur-Kacheguda Vande Bharat Express.

Steep fee for six-month CBSE bridge course worries teachers

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> **The last date for registration has now been extended to March 10. According to NIOS, as of Dec 29, 2025, 38 primary teachers in Bengaluru paid; across India, 62,657 did so**

Bengaluru: The Central Board of Secondary Education's directive to in-service primary teachers to attend a six-month bridge course hasn't gone down well with them. Several teachers have raised concern about the Rs 25,000 fee charged for the programme.

The directive is for in-service primary school teachers, who were appointed with BEd degree between June 28, 2018, and Aug 11, 2023. This mandatory training by National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is required to validate their employment, as per a SC order.

However, teachers said the course comes at a cost of Rs 25,000. "It is no secret that all private school teachers are not so well paid. How can we afford a course fee of that scale for an online course?" asked a teacher.

Sandeep Pai S, chairperson of Bangalore Sahodaya, an association of CBSE schools, said while it is necessary for teachers to upgrade, it should be made available at an affordable cost.

"BEd teachers are given training based on subject specialisation that is applicable for class 6 and above. Our logic is that if a teacher is capable of teaching in class 6, she/he can teach grade 1 as well. This is not true as lower classes call for a different set of capabilities. The training is, therefore, crucial," he said.

"At the same time, when it is made mandatory, training should be given at an affordable cost. We know that salary of a teacher is not uniform in schools. As a one-time measure, the fees should be reduced," he added.

'Ferocious dog breed' policy: GBA awaits draft from 5 corps

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For representation

The urban development dept has written to city corporations to conduct public consultations

Bengaluru: The proposed regulation of so-called "ferocious dog breeds" has hit a pause in the city as civic authorities are waiting for draft recommendations from the five municipal corporations before taking any new steps.

Over the past month, Greater Bengaluru Authority (GBA) revisited the issue following a reported rise in dog-bite incidents across the city. GBA chief commissioner Maheshwar Rao, over a week ago, directed each city municipal corporation to prepare and submit a draft proposal. "We sent a reminder. The urban development department wrote to them to conduct public consultations, consolidate feedback and submit a draft. We are awaiting their response," Rao said.

The issue dates back to the March 12, 2024, communication issued by the Union ministry of fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying that identified 24 dog breeds, including Pitbull Terriers, Rottweilers, American Bulldogs and Cane Corsos, as potentially dangerous to human life. The advisory proposed prohibiting their import, breeding, sale and licensing, and recommended sterilisation of existing pets to prevent breeding.

The high court granted a stay on implementing the policy in the state in April last year. In Bengaluru, where several large-breed dogs are kept in both independent homes and apartment complexes, the Centre's proposal sparked a polarised debate. Pet owners argued that targeting specific breeds was unfair and did not address the root cause of aggression.

Raghav Menon, a pitbull owner from HSR Layout, said his dog had never displayed violent behaviour. "My pitbull is five years old and has never harmed anyone. He's gentle with my children. It's not the breed that's dangerous — it's irresponsible ownership," he said.

Seconding him, Vikram Shetty, an American bulldog owner from Jayanagar, said, "If someone raises a dog poorly, any breed can become aggressive. Punish negligent owners, not dogs."

Sanjay Pillai, an Akita owner from Rajajinagar, cautioned against breed-specific bans, arguing that temperament is influenced more by upbringing, training and environment than genetics alone.

With legal clarity awaited and consultations still pending, the proposed regulation remains suspended, caught between public safety concerns, judicial scrutiny and pet-owning community.

Woman leaves house to look for phone, found dead

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Bengaluru: A 30-year-old woman was found murdered close to an agricultural field in Siddapura, near Whitefield, Wednesday, with preliminary investigation pointing to death by strangulation.

The deceased, Sonali Khatun, a resident of Siddapura and native of Murshidabad in West Bengal, was employed as a housekeeper at a private facility management firm in Brookefield.

VARTHUR FIELD

Her husband, Babu Shek, 33, a construction labourer, told police the family had moved to Bengaluru about a year ago in search of work. The couple lived with their two children — a 14-year-old boy and an eight-year-old girl — and Sonali's 60-year-old mother, Surra.

According to his complaint, on Tuesday around 7.30pm, Sonali returned home and told him she had left her mobile phone at her workplace. She took her husband's phone and stepped out to retrieve her phone, but never returned.

When the family attempted to contact her on a borrowed phone, the husband's phone rang once before being switched off. Her own phone was also unreachable.

On Wednesday, her body was found. DCP (Whitefield) Saidulu Adavath said the family learnt about her death only after Varthur police visited their residence while tracing her address. Prima facie, it appears she was strangled to death, he said, adding the exact cause will be confirmed after autopsy. Varthur police have registered a case of murder.

An officer said they are yet to ascertain whether she met someone known to her or if there was any sexual assault. There were no visible external injuries except the strangulation marks.

CCTV footage from buildings in Siddapura is being examined to trace suspects. Sonali's husband's phone is missing, while her phone remains switched off. Police also visited her workplace to verify if she had indeed left her phone there. Efforts are on to trace the devices.

METRO WRAP

Lunar eclipse on March 3

On the evening of March 3, Bengalureans will have the opportunity to witness the end of a total lunar eclipse. The moon is forecast to rise at 6:28pm and residents can observe the end of the umbral phase, which concludes at 6:48pm. Similarly, those in Mysuru and Mangaluru can watch the eclipse between 4:34pm and 6:48pm.

Second GBA draft rolls early next month

Three city corporations will publish their revised draft electoral rolls in early March. The ward-wise draft electoral rolls of North, South and East city corporations will be published on March 9, and voters will be given time till March 16 to address discrepancies.

ALMANAC (27.2.2026)

Kumbha Masa 15 – Shri Vishwavasu Nama Samvatsara – Uttarayana – Shishira Ritu – Tithi: Phalguna Sukla Ekadasi h. 22-33 Nakshatra: Ardra h. 30-49 Yoga: Ayushman h. 19-44. 9 Ramadan Kali Day 1872633
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You live forever in our hearts

Fondly Remembered by:
Mrs & Mr. K. Kantharaj, ESIC,
Family & Friends

OBITUARY

DEATH ANNIVERSARY

Ever Loving Memory Of

First Death Anniversary

VERONICA MARY MACHADO (WINNIE)
(1938-2025)

Mummy,
We remember your deep love, care, Warmth, wisdom, joy of life, concern for all. Your example, all that you were, Still impacts our lives, Lives forever in our hearts.

In everlasting memory:
Family, Relations & friends

Remembrance

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27.02.2001

M.T.KRISHNA REDDY
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"Your life was a blessing your memory a treasure. You are loved beyond words and missed beyond measure"

Fondly remembered by
Sons, Daughters, Son-in-laws Daughter-in-laws, Grand Childrens & Family Members

3rd Death Anniversary

05.05.1938 - 27.02.2023

In Loving Memory of
Sri. S. A. Ramalingam

Deeply Mourned by:
Family & Friends

REMEMBRANCE
SHARING MEMORIES

Remembrance

KIRAN NAIK

Your voice, your smile, and your quiet strength remain with us every day. Missed beyond words, loved beyond measure."

-Wife, kids and family members.

BIRTH DAY REMEMBRANCE

Dr.R G SANGORAM

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Smt Jatan Devi Kathotia

01 January 1942 — 23 February 2026

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w/o Late Shri Nirmal Kumar Kathotia

Prayer Service
Sunday, 01 March 2026
4:00 — 5:30 pm | The Ballroom, Taj West End

In grief
Son & Daughter-In-Law:
Anil & Babita Kathotia
Sanjay & Neelam Kathotia

Grandchildren:
Chahat & Siddhant Mandhana
Dhwani & Aman Poddar
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TIMES NATION
THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2026

AI COULD WIDEN INEQUALITIES IF NOT USED FOR BETTERMENT OF SOCIETY: AMITABH KANT

GITA'S SPIRITUAL TEACHINGS CAN GIVE NEW DIRECTION TO YOUTH: PRESIDENT MURMU

HACK OF THE DAY — HAVE A COMPLAINT AGAINST ANY GOVT DEPT? DO THIS

WHAT IT SOLVES: Provides a single official platform to raise complaints against central ministries, PSUs, banks, railways, telecom departments and other govt bodies—ensuring accountability and time-bound responses.

WHAT TO DO (QUICK STEPS):

1. Visit https://pgportal.gov.in
2. Register/ Login using mobile or email.
3. Click Lodge Public Grievance → select ministry/department.
4. Describe the issue clearly → upload supporting documents.
5. Submit and track using the registration number.

NOTE: Most departments must respond within 30 days. Unresolved cases can be escalated through the portal.

Hacks are based on verified public sources. Readers are advised to follow official websites & updated rules

Tip from **abhishek.naliwal**@timesinternet.com

Scan for more hacks

Passenger prevents accident after bus driver collapses

Kottayam: A passenger averted a major accident in Kerala's Alappuzha after a 49-year-old KSRTC driver suffered a cardiac arrest at the wheel. Noticing R Pradeep losing consciousness, Joseph Antony grabbed the steering wheel and rammed the bus into a commercial building wall. The driver later died in hospital. TNN

45% drop in Indians at US univs over visa uncertainty, high cost

Int'l Applications To Indian Management Programmes Rise 25%: Study

Manash.Gohain
@timesofindia.com

iStock

NEW DESTINATIONS

New Delhi: A 45% decline in Indian student enrolments at US universities in Aug 2025, alongside a 25% rise in international applications to Indian graduate management programmes, points to a clear realignment in global management education, according to Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC)'s latest white paper.

The data, exclusively accessed by **TOI**, indicates the long-dominant North American study corridor is losing ground to Asia and continental Europe, shaped by visa policies, currency pressures and affordability concerns.

GMAC's 2025 Application Trends Survey shows international applications increased in Europe (excluding the UK) and Asia, while declining across Canada, the UK and the US, with the drop in international demand outweighing growth in domestic applications.

A pulse survey of 361 business schools found 54% of programmes in the Asia-Pacific region reported higher international enrolment in fall 2025 compared with the previous year, while two-thirds of programmes in the Americas recorded declines.

Visa uncertainty is also affecting outcomes after admission. Nearly 90% of programmes in the Americas cited India among the top countries from where students paid deposits but ultimately failed to matriculate, largely because of visa delays, denials or multiple deposits.

GMAC's Prospective Students Survey shows that non-US candidates' preference for studying in the US fell to 42% in 2025 from 57% in 2019, while Western Europe held steady at 63%. Application plans for Asia and Eastern Europe increased steadily through 2025, indicating diversification in destination choices. Among Central and South Asian applications to programmes in their home region and East and Southeast Asia rose, while preference for Western Europe increased by six percentage points year-on-year.

India continues to occupy a dual position in global mobility. More than two in five Indian business school programmes still reported the US as their top source of international students, underlining India's role as a major sender of global management talent. The 25% rise in international applications to Indian programmes suggests that the country is emerging as a destination in its own right. Schools in Canada, the US and the UK most frequently pointed to changes in visa policy and geopolitical conditions as the main reasons for falling applications.

Camera found in TISS girls' hostel bathroom in Guwahati

Mukut.Das
@timesofindia.com

Guwahati: A camera concealed inside a soap packet was discovered in a bathroom of a girls' hostel at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) campus in Guwahati Wednesday, triggering a police investigation and protests by students over safety and privacy.

A student found the device while using the bathroom. News spread quickly across campus, prompting students to demand swift action and accountability from authorities.

Tata Institute of Social Sciences administration called the incident a "serious violation of privacy" that was "entirely unacceptable and condemnable". A police complaint has been filed, according to a source in the administration. The source said an internal review of security protocols has begun and described this as the first such case reported on the campus.

Aadhaar centres to go live on Google Maps

Times News Network

New Delhi: Locating an authorised Aadhaar centre is set to become simpler with Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) partnering with Google to display verified centres on Google Maps. The move aims to improve ease of access and cut confusion by directing residents only to authorised locations.

Under the initiative, users will be able to identify nearby Aadhaar centres and check what services — like adult enrolment, child enrolment, or address and mobile number updates — on offer. Where available, Google Maps listings will also show details like operating hours, parking facilities and 'divyang-friendly' infrastructure. The facility is expected to be rolled out in the coming months and will cover over 60,000 Aadhaar centres, including Aadhaar Seva Kendras (ASKs). The collaboration is also intended to counter misinformation by ensuring that search results lead users to verified centres only.

"This collaboration will ensure that navigating authorised Aadhaar centres is simpler, faster, and more transparent," said Bhuvnesh Kumar, CEO, UIDAI.

In the next phase, UIDAI will use Google Business Profile to manage centre information and respond to public feedback. The partnership may also explore direct appointment bookings through Google Maps enabling residents to plan visits with greater efficiency.

No visual proof of assault on Kerala health minister

Kozhikode: Twenty-four hours after Kerala's health minister Veena George was attacked with a weapon by members of the Kerala Students Union (KSU) during a protest at Kannur railway station, there is still no CCTV footage or recorded videos to substantiate it.

An FIR registered by the Kannur railway police stated that five KSU protesters allegedly struck George on her neck with a weapon and assaulted her gunman when he attempted to stop them.

The opposition members reiterated their stand that the allegation was unfounded. They added the presence of TV cameras and mobile phones at the site should have captured such an assault. To back the assault claim, CPM state secretariat member M V Jayarajan released a video showing what he described as a black cloth seen near minister's neck, arguing that it showed protesters had come close to her. But Congress and KSU leaders countered it saying the black cloth was the dark attire worn by her gunman. TNN

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On consideration of the available vacancies which are coming out for direct recruitment for the post of Assistant/Clerk in Civil Courts of the State of Jharkhand as per Rule 14 of the Jharkhand State Civil Courts' Officers and Staffs (Recruitment, Promotion, Transfer and other Service Conditions) Rules, 2018, it has been noted that the vacancy stands at 265. This is for information to all concerned that the number of vacancies which were advertised as 410, will now be read as 265.

The Category-wise breakup of the said 265 vacancies, is as follows:-

Category	Vacancy	Horizontal Reservation under total vacancy					
		Reservation for Women	Blindness and short-sightedness	Deaf and hearing impairment	Locomotive Handicapped & Cerebral Palsy	Autism & Multiple Disabilities	Games & Sports quota
Un-Reserved	45	00	04				00
B.C-I	25	00					
B.C-II	15	00					
Scheduled Caste	38	00					
Scheduled Tribe	94	00					
EWS	48	00					
TOTAL	265	00	04				00

Note: Vacancies under each category have been tabulated as per the district-wise vacancies under each category and horizontal reservation has been calculated as per district-wise vacancies in each category for women and upon total vacancy in each district for PWD.

All other terms & conditions of the Advertisement No. 05/ Admn. Misc./ 2024 shall remain unchanged.

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Modi reaffirms India's firm belief in peaceful dialogue

Sachin.Parashar
@timesofindia.com

PM Narendra Modi in Israel on Thursday said, "The Gaza Peace Plan has opened a pathway towards peace. India has extended its full support to these efforts. In the future as well, we will continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation with all countries."

In a joint statement, PM Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed US President Donald Trump's "Comprehensive Plan to End the Gaza Conflict". They discussed the regional developments, including the peace process, and underlined the need for the establishment of a just and durable peace, security and freedom of navigation and trade in the region through dialogue and mutual understanding, said the statement.

While discussing the regional situation, Modi and Netanyahu also spoke about the US-Iran tensions, with Modi underlining India's "firm belief" in dialogue and the significance of pursuing a peaceful solution. Foreign secretary Vikram Misri said that the PM reiterated his readiness to offer, if required, India's support towards a peaceful solution.

The meeting resulted in more than 20 outcomes, including signing of 16 MoUs/ agreements spreading over areas like AI, education, horizon scanning, culture, labour mobility and geophysical exploration for "sustainable resource development". The leaders shared their vision and provided a roadmap for further strengthening "trusted cooperation" in defence, with Modi saying both sides will advance towards joint development, joint production, and transfer of technology.

Modi said technology lies at the heart of India-Israel future partnership. "We have decided to establish a Critical and Emerging Technologies Partnership. This will impart fresh momentum to cooperation in areas such as AI, quantum technologies, and critical minerals," he said. According to the joint statement, this initiative would synergise the individual strengths of both countries in niche technologies, fostering a focused and futuristic partnership.

Looking to promote regional connectivity, both sides agreed to move forward with "renewed momentum" on the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and India-Israel-UAE-USA (I2U2).

On terrorism, Modi said that India and Israel are unequivocal in their position that terrorism cannot be accepted in any form and manifestation. "We have stood shoulder to shoulder in opposing terrorism and those who support it, and we will continue to do so," he said, carrying on from where he left on the issue in his Knesset address.

The leaders condemned cross-border terrorism in the joint statement, including the Pahalgam attack, Red Fort "terror incident" and Oct 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist strikes. "They called for decisive and concerted international efforts to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner. Expressing the grave concern over this common challenge, the prime ministers reaffirmed their collective resolve to combat this menace as the leaders of two vibrant and resilient democracies," said the statement.

According to Modi, both sides resolved to give agriculture collaboration a futuristic direction. "The Centres of Excellence established in India with Israel's cooperation stand today as outstanding examples of our friendship. Encouraged by their success, we have set a target to expand their number to 100," he said.

MAJOR ANNOUNCEMENTS & MOUs

Initiative to collaborate in critical and emerging technologies led by national security advisors

- MoUs for cooperation in AI and advancing education through Artificial Intelligence
- MoU for cross-border remittances between India and Israel via the Unified Payments Interface
- Quota of up to 50,000 Indian workers in Israel over the next five years
- MoU to facilitate geophysical exploration
- Elevation of relationship to special strategic partnership
- Ministerial level talks on science and technology
- India-Israel Parliamentary Friendship Group
- Establishment of an India-Israel centre of excellence in cybersecurity in India

First round of FTA talks concludes

India and Israel concluded the first round of negotiations for the India-Israel FTA Thursday.

PM Modi, while addressing the Knesset Wednesday, had called for early finalisation of an ambitious FTA to realise the untapped trade potential between the two countries.

Commerce minister Piyush Goyal met the visiting Israeli delegation and emphasised that both sides should work to unlock new opportunities. ANI

Bipartisan MPs' panel can boost ties with Israel: PM

Times News Network

New Delhi: The bipartisan Parliamentary Friendship Groups of MPs recently announced by Lok Sabha received a hearty endorsement from PM Narendra Modi in his address to Israel's Knesset, as he dwelt on the role it can play in strengthening ties at the level of legislatures between the two countries.

Modi called for greater parliamentary interaction between the two democracies, making use of the parliamentary group headed by BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab which has been tasked with engaging with lawmakers from Israel.

The idea of constituting such committees, 64 of which were announced by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Monday, was seeded during Modi's interaction with the MPs from multi-party delegations that were formed to convey India's stand to the world after Operation Sindoor, as there was realisation at the highest levels in govt of the role they had played in projecting a bipartisan stand on the issue of national interest.

Modi had then spoken about institutionalising the bipartisan platform, which finally culminated in 64 such groups being set up to foster ties with 61 countries and three blocs, including EU Parliament and Nordic nations.

If the exercise, which is conventionally conducted with inputs from govt, reflected Parliament's keenness to deepen exchanges with legislatures across the world to complement traditional diplomacy, its decidedly bipartisan composition has conveyed an attempt to build inter-party camaraderie amid rising acrimony between the ruling BJP-led NDA and opposition parties.

The groups include the eight MPs, seven from Congress and one from CPM, who were suspended during the Budget session from Lok Sabha for their "unruly" protest.

Birla himself is facing an Opposition notice for his removal from office, which is expected to be taken up on Mar 9 when Parliament reconvenes after a recess.

Governing National Democratic Alliance MPs from the two Houses head 37 of these groups while others chair 27, including 10 from Congress and three each from Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Trinamool Congress and Samajwadi Party, three key opposition parties.

PM Modi poses for a selfie with the cast and creators of Netflix series Fauda. 'No undercover work, only a selfie,' Modi wrote on X; The Prime Minister also visited Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust during a memorial ceremony accompanied by Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu

Indo-Israeli fire control tech fitted on 96 Army T-72 tanks

Chethan.Kumar
@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: Indian Army has completed installation of Thermal Imaging Fire Control Systems (TIFCS) — an Indo-Israeli technology developed in Bengaluru — on 96 of its T-72 tanks, with the systems clearing firing validation trials before induction.

T-72 remains one of the mainstays of Indian Army's armoured fleet. Upgrades such as thermal imaging and automatic target tracking are aimed at extending operational relevance, particularly in low-visibility and night operations where older optical systems have limitations.

The upgrade has been executed by Alpha-Elsec Defence & Aerospace Systems Pvt Ltd, a joint venture between Bengaluru-based Alpha Design and Israel's Elbit Systems. A contract for the supply and installation of 96 TIFCS units was signed with the Army in 2023.

While India and Israel are expected to finalise a framework allowing companies from both countries to deepen cooperation during PM Modi's visit, the Alpha-Elbit collaboration was a result of an earlier agreement between the two nations.

TIFCS is designed to strengthen the T-72's night-fighting capability. It automatically acquires inputs from external sensors, carries out ballistic corrections and feeds corrected target data into the fire control system. An integrated automatic target tracker (ATT) enables continuous tracking of moving targets, allowing engagement in dynamic conditions, including at night.

Alpha said firing validation trials of the indigenously manufactured systems were conducted by the Army during Nov-Dec 2025, after which the installations were completed. Alpha-Elsec CEO Nataraj Krishnappa told **TOI**: "Alpha-Elsec has been making steady and significant progress in the manufacture of advanced opto-electronic equipment for the Indian Armed Forces."

Following the completion of this order, Alpha-Elsec said it has seen an increase in its order book for indigenous defence supplies.

TIFCS, developed by a company based out of Bengaluru with Israeli firm, is designed to strengthen tanks' night-fighting capability

India's standing diminished, says Cong on Modi's Knesset address

New Delhi: Congress Thursday said PM Modi's address to the Knesset was an "unabashed defence of his host" Benjamin Netanyahu, adding it has diminished India's moral standing. The party released a letter by Jawaharlal Nehru to Albert Einstein, in which the first PM termed the rights of Arabs as crucial in the context of creation of Israel.

Referring to Modi's statement that India had recognised Israel on the day of his birth, Congress spokesman **Jairam Ramesh** said Einstein wrote to Nehru on June 13, 1947, on the subject of creation of Israel, and the latter replied on July 11.

He posted Nehru's letter on X. TNN

COMING UP

TOI presents a round-up of forthcoming key events and birthdays of notable personalities. Scan the QR code to post your wishes

Feb 27

BS Yediyurappa
Four-time Karnataka CM
BSYBJP
bsybjp

New Series
GDP data with new base year to be out

Feb 28

Digvijaya Singh
Two-time Madhya Pradesh CM, Congress' Rajya Sabha MP
digvijaya_28
digvijayasingh official

March 1

MK Stalin
8th CM of Tamil Nadu, and president of DMK
mkstalin mkstalin

Nitish Kumar
10-time Bihar CM, and president of JDU
NitishKumar
cmbiharnitishkumar

T20 World Cup
India take on West Indies for a place in semis

March 2

Tiger Shroff
Actor and martial artist known for action movies like Baaghi 4
iTIGERSHROFF tigerjackieshroff

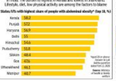
Anandji Virji Shah
National award-winning music director; part of the Kalyanji-Anandji duo

STATOISTICS A slice of life in numbers

India's expanding waistline: Which states are most affected?

ICMR data show abdominal obesity affects 40% of adults aged 20+ in India. The burden is highest in Kerala and lowest in Jharkhand. Lifestyle, diet, low physical activity are among the factors to blame

States/UTs with highest share of people with abdominal obesity* (top 10, %)



State/UT	%
Kerala	58.2
Punjab	57.2
Haryana	56.9
Delhi	55
Himachal	54.6
Puducherry	51.8
Sikkim	48.4
Goa	47.6
Uttarakhand	46.1
Manipur	40.7

*Aged 20 or above; Answer to Lok Sabha question dated Feb 13, 2026

Source: Ministry of health & family welfare

Govt: Carney's visit at 'crucial juncture'

New Delhi: After Canada, India too Thursday announced the four-day visit by Canadian PM **Mark Carney** beginning Friday, saying it comes at an important juncture in normalisation of India-Canada bilateral relations. The govt said PM Modi and Carney had earlier agreed to pursue a constructive and balanced partnership grounded in mutual respect for each other's concerns. TNN

Disinformation eroding public trust, says Vaishnaw

▸Continued from page 1

Information and broadcasting minister Ashwini Vaishnaw's pitch for "fair compensation" comes amid a debate raging globally over the refusal of social media giants to compensate creators of content which they have used to make huge profits.

The conduct of platforms was under focus at the conclave deliberations, with Vaishnaw saying social media companies can no longer function as neutral intermediaries. They now operate like publishers and must be accountable for the content they host and amplify, he said.

Vaishnaw said the internet's evolution into a powerful media ecosystem demands a redistribution of responsibility. "The nature of the internet has changed...today it has become a powerful media outlet, where, like media, the platforms must take responsibility," he said, adding, "Platforms must take responsibility for what they are publishing."

Warning that deepfakes, disinformation and synthetic media are eroding public trust, the minister said the damage goes beyond individual harm. "The entire society is built upon trust in institutions...that core tenet of trust is under threat," he said.

India-UK FTA may come into force soon: Official

New Delhi: The India-UK free trade agreement, concluded last year, may come into force soon, a UK govt official said Thursday, reports **Atul Mathur**.

Refusing to commit to a deadline, the official said the agreement with India was going through a few "parliamentary procedures" in the UK and expressed hope that it may be implemented by the summer this year. "We're not putting a particular date or a particular deadline, but we do want to see it come into effect as soon as possible and we're confident that will be the case," the official said.

India and the UK signed their bilateral FTA in July last year, under which around 99% of Indian exports will gain duty-free access, while India will lower tariffs on a wide range of goods, including automobiles and whisky. The official said that while some tariff cuts may kick in immediately, others may be phased out over time. The agreement has to be ratified by UK Parliament while approved by the Union cabinet in India before it can be implemented.

3-time CM & expelled AIADMK veteran OPS to join DMK

Julie.Mariappan
@timesofindia.com

Chennai: Three-time Tamil Nadu CM and expelled AIADMK veteran **O Panneerselvam** (OPS) is likely to join DMK on Friday, multiple sources told **TOI**. DMK may give him a seat — probably Bodinayakkanur in Theni, which he won in 2021 — to contest in the upcoming assembly election.

OPS (75), who has been fighting long — and so far unsuccessful — battles in courts and before EC to return to, if not regain control of, AIADMK, is expected to join the party in the presence of CM MK Stalin at the DMK headquarters.

Sources said OPS, who had been sending feelers to DMK, took the decision after AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami (EPS) welcomed AMMK chief TTV Dhinakaran, another expelled AIADMK neta, into NDA. EPS was firm that he wouldn't take back OPS.

DMK functionaries said there was an exchange of messages with OPS. "We told him to join our party. He is scheduled to join tomorrow (Friday) morning," a DMK functionary told **TOI**.

OPS, who had checked into a hotel, remained unreachable.

His supporters, R Vaithilingam and Paul Manoj Pandian, resigned as MLAs and joined DMK in Jan and Nov, respectively. In Aug, OPS withdrew from NDA, citing "insults" from the BJP camp. Four months later, he called on Union home minister Amit Shah to convey that he would not join NDA unless AIADMK factions were unified. On Sunday, Panneerselvam said Shah had told him DMK alliance was strong enough to win against a divided AIADMK.

HC reserves verdict on 'The Kerala Story 2' film

Kochi: Hours after a single judge put on hold the release of 'The Kerala Story 2- Goes Beyond' film for 15 days, a division bench of the Kerala high court on Thursday considered an appeal against the interim order and reserved its verdict in the matter.

A bench of Justices Sushrut Arvind Dharmadhikari and P V Balakrishnan reserved its decision following a late evening hearing of nearly two hours during which it observed that the pleas opposing the film's certification were in the nature of a public interest litigation (PIL) and questioned how the single judge could hear it.

The bench, however, did not pass any interim order in the court, at the conclusion of the hearing, as sought by the producer. PTI

ED investigation is based on FIRs by CBI

▸Continued from page 1

ED probe is based on FIRs by CBI, which filed its first case in Aircel Maxis deal, where a quid pro quo was alleged against the former finance minister for "illegally" granting FIPB (foreign investment promotion board) approval for $800 million FDI (foreign direct investment).

In the case concerning INX Media, CBI registered its FIR in 2017 against his son Karti Chidambaram and others, and later in a prosecution complaint (chargesheet) filed in 2020, the agency made P Chidambaram "accused No 1". The other accused in the case are Karti, associates and several alleged shell companies.

In the INX Media alleged bribery deal, the agency said, it identified "proceeds of crime" of over Rs 66 crore and attached them through two orders, which have been confirmed by the adjudicating authority. In this case, the special court took cognisance of the chargesheet against P Chidambaram and Karti on March 24, 2021. However, trials against them have remained pending despite what ED has called "its best efforts".

In the other case related to FIPB approval for Aircel Maxis, ED has alleged that "as part of a larger conspiracy, approval was fraudulently and dishonestly granted by the then FM P Chidambaram on March 20, 2006." The agency claimed that its investigation has revealed that "P Chidambaram granted FIPB approval to Aircel Maxis in lieu of quid pro quo".

Two prosecution chargesheets were filed against him in 2018 in the Aircel Maxis case. The special court in Rouse Avenue also took cognisance of the chargesheets, prima facie validating ED's findings. "Prosecution complaint dated June 13, 2018, and a supplementary prosecution complaint dated Oct 25, 2018, was filed before the Special Court (PMLA), Rouse Avenue, New Delhi, wherein P Chidambaram was arraigned as 'accused A-6'. The special court vide its order dated Nov 27, 2021, took cognisance of the commission of an offence of money laundering," ED said, adding that it has since been making "all efforts to fast track the trial" in the case.

ED said its investigation revealed that "illegal gratification of Rs 1.16 crore was received by Karti Chidambaram."

US weakened global organisations: Merkel

Merkel with Sonia & ex-PM Singh's wife Gursharan Kaur

New Delhi: US has weakened international organisations and multilateralism is under threat, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel said while delivering the inaugural Dr Manmohan Singh lecture. Referring to Russia's attack on Ukraine, she said the principle of territorial integrity in Europe was violated, forcing the European order "into a corner".

"The right of territorial integrity and sovereignty was trampled. Multilateralism as a concept for our cooperation is under pressure," she said, adding that the global order had been shaken. "US under Trump weakened international organisations such as WHO, World Trade Organization and the Paris Climate Agreement. They even question the role of UN or replace it with unilateral action.

"The previous order of cooperation is being replaced by one in which might means right," said Merkel, who served as Germany's chancellor for 16 years. TNN

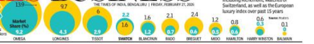
TIMES BUSINESS

It's Time For A Strategy Revamp For Swatch

Once a global pioneer in tech-forward plastic watches, Swatch is failing to capture imaginations or market since the 2010 death of its founder Nicolas Hayek. With no major acquisitions since 2013, analysts say the watchmaker's 16-brand portfolio is dated

Most brands of the Swatch portfolio lost market share in the past 5 years

Share of total global exports by value by Swiss watchmakers between 2019 and 2024



Source: Reuters

Swatch's shares are up 18% this yr on strong fourth quarter sales, but they have **significantly lagged rivals** including Richemont, Watches of Switzerland, as well as the European luxury index over past 15 years

Blowout earnings, investors still fret over Nvidia

Nvidia, the dominant maker of artificial intelligence processors, failed to impress investors with its latest sales forecast, signalling that concerns about an overheated AI economy will continue to dog the company.

Though the chipmaker delivered a 73% surge in fourth-quarter revenue and a first-quarter outlook that easily beat the average Wall Street estimate, Nvidia shares fell as much as 1.6% during a conference call with analysts. The stock was up less than 1% in premarket trading on Thursday.

It was a stark reminder of the scepticism now surrounding Nvidia. After explosive sales growth turned the chipmaker into the world's most valuable company, investors are seeking stronger assurances that booming AI sales are here to stay. "By most measures, Nvidia delivered a solid set of results," analysts at JPMorgan Chase & Co. said in a note after the results. "Even so, the stock response suggests investors were left wanting more."

CEO Jensen Huang pushed back on the concerns during Wednesday's call, arguing that customers are already making money from their newly acquired computing power. That's why clients will keep investing at elevated levels, he said. "You need compute capacity, and that translates directly to growth, and that translates directly to revenues," Huang said. "I'm confident their cash flows are growing."

> You need compute capacity, and that translates directly to growth, and that translates directly to revenues...I'm confident their cash flows are growing
>
> **Jensen Huang** | CEO, NVIDIA

Chief financial officer Colette Kress tried to defuse other concerns raised by analysts, including the spectre of supply constraints. The company has secured enough components to meet growing demand, she said. It remains a challenge to produce enough of Nvidia's most advanced chips, she told analysts. But the company's current Blackwell lineup — and an upcoming successor, called Rubin — will still beat earlier sales projections, Kress said. Nvidia had previously said that the chips would generate $500 billion by the end of 2026.

"We believe we have inventory and supply commitments in place to address future demand, including shipments extending into calendar 2027," she said.

Nvidia still faces uncertainty in China, the largest market for chips. The US govt has granted licences to ship a small amount of H200 processors to customers there, but Nvidia does not know if the Chinese govt will give its approval, Kress said. For now, the company will continue to exclude data centre revenue in China from its forecasts. The small-scale licence provided by the Trump administration requires the chips to go through a US inspection before they can be shipped to customers, Nvidia said. The processors are also subject to a 25% tariff when they come into the US.

Fiscal first-quarter revenue will be about $78 billion, the chipmaker said. Though the average prediction was $72.8 billion, some analysts had projected numbers approaching $80 billion, according to data compiled by Bloomberg. In the fiscal fourth quarter, which ended Jan 25, revenue gained 73% to $68.1 billion. Profit was $1.62 a share, excluding certain items. Analysts had predicted $65.9 billion in sales and $1.53 a share in earnings.

"We aren't sure what else investors want to hear at this point. But we like what we heard," Bernstein analyst Stacy Rasgon wrote in a note after results. Nvidia's data centre unit, which is responsible for its industry-leading AI accelerator and networking products, had revenue of $62.3 billion in the quarter. That compares with an average analyst estimate of $60.4 billion.

One cloud is hanging over the tech industry: a shortage of memory chips. Like much of the electronics industry, Nvidia's products are reliant on a steady supply of these components, which provide short-term storage in everything from smartphones to supercomputers. Constraints have sent memory prices soaring and made it harder to ship as many devices this year. BLOOMBERG

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Uber India's FY25 sales rise 2.3% to ₹3,849 crore

Times News Network

Bengaluru: Uber's India business posted total sales of Rs 3,849.2 crore in FY25, up 2.3% year-on-year, reflecting a sharp slowdown in growth even as losses widened significantly, according to consolidated financials accessed via Tofler.

Operating loss surged to Rs 1,052.3 crore from Rs 84.8 crore in FY24, with operating margin deteriorating to negative 27.3% from negative 2.2%. Net loss stood at Rs 1,511 crore for the year, compared with Rs 89 crore a year earlier. Net margin slipped to negative 39.3% from negative 2.3% in FY24. The FY25 performance includes a tax expense of Rs 358.8 crore.

LOSSES WIDEN

The results come amid intensifying competition in India's ride-hailing market. Uber global CEO Dara Khosrowshahi recently said Rapido had emerged as the company's toughest competitor in India, overtaking Ola in category position.

Expenses rose faster than revenue. Total expenses increased to Rs 5,048.1 crore in FY25 from Rs 3,976.9 crore a year earlier. Employee benefit costs climbed to Rs 3,293.6 crore from Rs 2,690.5 crore, while cost of goods sold rose to Rs 602.7 crore from Rs 457.4 crore.

Earlier regulatory filings showed Uber's India unit received Rs 2,721 crore in Jan from its Netherlands-based parent, Uber BV, following a Rs 200 crore infusion in Nov, taking recent capital support to nearly Rs 3,000 crore.

crazy bosses
POWER NEVER CORRUPTED ME. THE THOUGHT OF LOSING IT DID
SUNIL AGARWAL.IN

US tariff cut revives push for footwear factories in India

Global Brands Evaluate Capacity Expansion Post Revision

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Chennai: Asian footwear manufacturers are reviving plans to set up non-leather footwear factories in India, targeting exports to the American market, following a reduction in tariffs on Indian goods. Several investment proposals that had slowed over the past year after high tariffs were imposed by US President Donald Trump are now regaining momentum.

Close to a dozen overseas companies are exploring new manufacturing units in India. "This includes Taiwan-based Tienkang and Paiho, and Vietnam-based Chin Chen Fuh Vietnam Mold Manufacturing," said R Selvam, executive director of the Council for Leather Exports.

"In the wake of the tariff reduction, contract manufacturers have already begun ramping up production to meet renewed US orders. Several firms from Taiwan, Vietnam, China and Cambodia that had earlier deferred India plans are now keen to launch their projects," he added. Global brands with significant exposure to the US market — including Nike, Adidas, Crocs, Puma, Skechers and Asics — already manufacture footwear in India for exports, with many now evaluating capacity expansion following the tariff revision.

Industry representatives said improving export visibility to the US — the world's largest footwear market — is driving fresh investments and capacity expansion. Rafiq Ahmed, Chairman of Kothari Industrial Corporation, a leading non-leather footwear manufacturer producing Crocs-branded footwear, said the US had been the company's largest market before tariff hikes last year disrupted shipments. "Following the tariff impact, we diversified into markets such as South Korea, Europe and Canada. However, with tariff revisions leading to a revival in orders, we are now refocusing on the US market," Ahmed said, adding that global contract manufacturers are accelerating partnerships with Indian firms to establish new facilities amid rising demand.

> Contract manufacturers have already started ramping up their production to meet the orders from the US. In addition, new manufacturers from Taiwan, Vietnam, China and Cambodia are also keen on launching their new projects
>
> —**R SELVAM** | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, COUNCIL FOR LEATHER EXPORTS

Companies/groups showing interest in setting up new facilities in the non-leather footwear sector in India

- Tienkang, Taiwan | Paiho factory, Taiwan | Pouchen Group, Taiwan | L&E facility, Vietnam | V&S Packaging, Vietnam | Avery Dennison, Vietnam | Chin Chen Fuh Vietnam Mold Production, Vietnam

Source: Council for Leather Exports (CLE)

Echoing similar optimism, Israr Ahmed, managing director of Farida Group, said the company has been manufacturing New Balance shoes in Tamil Nadu through a joint venture with a Taiwan-based contract manufacturer. "More new companies coming to India will enhance our supply chain ecosystem in the non-leather footwear segment. It will also strengthen India's capabilities in producing sports footwear for global markets," he said. The proposed investments are expected to extend beyond footwear assembly, helping create a broader manufacturing ecosystem covering machinery, shoelaces, webbing, packaging solutions and components used in footwear and leather goods.

N Mohan, CEO–Footwear at KICL, said Vietnam's rapid growth in footwear exports was largely driven by foreign direct investment, accounting for nearly 80% of capacity expansion.

Crocs: Tariffs didn't deter sourcing plans from India

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Mumbai: US tariffs never impacted Crocs' sourcing plans from India, a market key to the American footwear company's supply chain diversification strategy and where it has expanded to five factories over the past three years, said EVP and brand president **Anne Mehlman**, adding that lower tariffs now gives the firm more room to broaden sourcing from India.

"The tariffs didn't deter our sourcing strategy. Obviously, they made it a little difficult but didn't deter it. The lower tariffs give us more flexibility. India is an important part of our manufacturing base. It is in a very strategic area," Mehlman said in an interview here on Thursday.

India, Mehlman said, is evolving rapidly, making it challenging for brands to keep up with the pace of change. Mehlman, who is on a visit to the country after 18 months, is meeting the local team on ground, going to Crocs stores to learn more about the market. "The digital landscape is rapidly shifting," Mehlman said, alluding to the rise of quick deliveries. Shoes manufactured in Crocs' factories in Tamil Nadu are shipped to the US, South Korea, Canada and parts of Europe, sources said. Mehlman did not disclose the specifics.

Widening manufacturing capabilities in India, which is also one of Crocs' top five focus international retail markets alongside Japan, China, South Korea and parts of Western Europe will allow the firm to serve local consumers faster, Mehlman said.

An influx of global brands coupled with the growth of homegrown, affordable D2C footwear labels have made India a more competitive market for companies as consumers now have more choices. Crocs, popular for its colourful clogs has a premium positioning with prices starting from Rs 2,500. For the brand, international markets are driving revenue growth with India contributing significantly to the business coming from the segment. "About 50% of our business is outside the US now. Increase in GDP, growing base of middle class consumers as well as a younger consumer base ….these factors are driving the brand growth in India," Mehlman said.

Textiles, gems & jewellery get duty boost

▸ Continued from page 1

The sudden meeting happened after Lutnick's trip to India to attend a wedding in Jodhpur, where he landed in the evening. A photo released by the US embassy showed that Goyal's wife Seema and Lutnick's spouse Allison also joined them and Gor.

After last Friday's ruling by Supreme Court, India and the US decided to reschedule the visit by chief negotiator Darpan Jain and his team to work out the legal text for the interim framework.

The US is India's largest export destination, accounting for nearly a fifth of goods exports. The recent tariff relief has provided a boost to sectors such as textiles, leather, seafoods, carpets and gems and jewellery, which were hit hard by the 50% tariffs, including the 25% penalty for Indian refiners purchasing Russian crude.

Long-term life cycle MFs get Sebi approval

PFRDA-Regulated Schemes To Help Plan Investments With 5 To 30 Year Life Spans

Times News Network

Mumbai: Retail investors looking for a simpler way to plan for long-term goals such as retirement and children's education may soon have some easier options. Markets regulator Sebi on Thursday allowed fund houses to launch life-cycle funds.

Life cycle funds are open-ended schemes designed around a target maturity date and a pre-set asset allocation glide path. In simple terms, they invest more in equities when the goal is several years down the line and gradually shift toward debt and other low-risk assets as the maturity date approaches, aiming to reduce risk over time.

For retail investors, life cycle funds could act as a 'set-and-forget' investment option, especially for those unsure how to rebalance portfolios over time, a Sebi circular said. National Pension System, regulated by the Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority, allows investors to invest in life cycle funds.

The regulatory nod for life cycle funds came as part of Sebi's move to recategorise and reorganise various MF schemes. In some cases, the regulator has addressed the issue of portfolio overlap like value and contra funds managed by the same fund house. The Sebi circular said that these funds could have life spans of at least five years at launch and at most 30 years, with five-year intervals. Fund houses may keep up to six such schemes open for subscription at a time, Sebi said. As a scheme nears maturity, it can be merged with a similar one with investor consent, it said.

To encourage long-term discipline, the regulator has also prescribed exit loads of up to 3% for early withdrawals within three years of investment. The Sebi move "appears to be one toward more structured, goal-oriented investing with transparent asset allocation frameworks and consistent investment mandates," said Aditya Agarwal, co-founder, Wealthy.in, a wealth management platform for MF distributors. These options are aligned with global best practices, he said.

The key feature of a life cycle fund is the glide path, Sebi said. For example, a 30-year life cycle fund may invest 65-95% in equities when more than 15 years are remaining. The same scheme may cut its equity exposure to as low as 5–20% when less than a year is remaining.

As equity investments slide, debt allocations rise correspondingly. For life cycle funds, the regulator also capped exposure to gold, silver ETFs, InvITs and exchange-traded commodity derivatives at 10%.

Set & Forget Funds For Retirement, Child Education

Life cycle MFs are helpful for long-term investments, especially when investors are unsure about rebalancing portfolios. Their glide paths are a key feature. For example, a 30-year life cycle fund may invest 65-95% in equities when more than 15 years remain, cutting its equity exposure to 5-20% when less than a year remains

- Life spans of 5-30 years, with five-year intervals
- Fund houses may keep up to six such schemes open for subscription at a time
- Can be merged with similar schemes with investor consent near maturity
- Exit loads of up to 3% for early withdrawals within three years

Sebi warns against fake STT notices

Mumbai: Sebi on Thursday warned investors about fraudsters sending forged notices demanding Securities Transaction Tax (STT) payments. The regulator said STT is collected by brokers and Sebi never seeks such remittances or coordinates with the RBI. It urged the public to verify communications on its website and use official payment portals after scammers impersonated officials and duped investors of their hard-earned money. TNN

Why savers are borrowing: Rise of convenience credit

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Mumbai: The old joke about bankers was that they would lend you an umbrella when the sun was shining. Following the pushback against the surge in unsecured loans, that is what banks are doing, lending to customers who already have the resources. However, many customers are taking personal loans despite having savings, given the convenience and the desire to keep long-term savings separate.

"The profile of the customers who are actually borrowing is shifting slightly. It is going towards more mass affluent and affluent categories rather than only limited to the needy category," said Amit Pathak, head of personal loans and consumer lending at Kotak Mahindra Bank.

The shift also comes in the wake of wariness among the regulator and lenders over small-ticket personal loans, which proliferated through digital lenders but saw increased delinquencies. "Banks have tightened underwriting for personal loans a lot; they will not give an unsecured personal loan to a new-to-credit borrower or issue a credit card unless they have a relationship with the bank," said Aditya Chatterjee, MD, Equifax Credit Information Services. But bankers are finding that the instant nature of these loans is helping to draw even borrowers with sufficient savings because of the convenience.

"Rather than dipping into investments, people have started borrowing and started meeting those needs. That's a very strong emerging trend," said Pathak.

According to him, personal loans are no longer seen as taboo, and savers would rather keep their long-term savings in mutual funds and fixed income intact than break the piggy bank for expenses.

According to Pathak, borrowing is for expenses such as home renovation or education, both of which are now seen as investments adding value.

They are also borrowing for "experiences" like international travel, and marriages continue to remain a key reason for borrowing.

One of the reasons why people are going for personal loans is that the decision is almost instantaneous, as the lenders' underwriting software connects directly to the credit bureau. "The API connection (the software bridge with the bank) provides the bureau report within two seconds, and the entire flow is 10-15 seconds," said Chatterjee. Also, for someone who has a large relationship value with the bank, lenders are willing to provide personal loans at single-digit rates.

Impact investor Aavishkaar leads ₹60cr funding in debt-relief platform FREED

Mumbai: Impact investor Aavishkaar Capital has led a Rs 60 crore investment in FREED, with participation from existing investors Sorin Investments, Piper Serica and Sattva Ventures, as unsecured retail lending and household leverage rise in India. Debt relief is a $50 billion industry across the US and other advanced markets. The latest funding comes at a time when consumer credit penetration is deepening in India and structured, compliant debt resolution is emerging as a necessary layer of financial infrastructure. Founded in 2020, the company positions itself as India's first comprehensive debt relief platform. TNN

iPhone surge: At $30bn, smartphones top exports in '25

Times News Network

New Delhi: Smartphones, led largely by Apple's iPhone, emerged as India's top export category for the first time, overtaking automotive diesel fuel in 2025, official data showed, indicating the impact of policy measures to boost exports.

Exports of smartphones during Jan-Dec 2025 rose to about $30.1 billion, up 47.5% from $20.4 billion in 2024, while automotive diesel fuel exports were at $16.3 billion. Other major export categories were cut and unmounted diamonds at $12.4 billion, medicines for retail sale at $10.7 billion, motor gasoline at $9.7 billion, and aviation turbine fuel at $9.5 billion.

LEADING THE PACK

India's top exports (in $ billion for Jan-Dec)

Commodity	2024	2025	YoY % change
Smartphones	20.4	30.1	47.5
Automotive diesel fuel	21.6	16.3	-24.5
Diamonds, cut/unmounted	13.7	12.4	-9.5
Medicines for retail sale	9.3	10.7	15.1
Motor gasoline	11.3	9.7	-14.2
Aviation turbine fuels	16.3	9.5	-41.7

Source: Commerce dept

Data on export destinations shows that the US widened its lead as India's largest market, as exports to the US rose 14.2% to $92.3 billion in 2025 from $80.7 billion a year earlier. The UAE remained the second-largest destination at $38.6 billion, while exports to China rose 19.3% to $18 billion, and shipments to the Netherlands and the UK declined.

The surge in smartphone exports was driven largely by Apple's iPhone shipments from India to the US and UAE. Industry estimates indicate that iPhones accounted for nearly three-quarters of total smartphone exports, with shipments reaching about $22 billion in 2025 as Apple's exports nearly doubled from the previous year.

Experts said several policy initiatives unveiled by govt, including the performance-linked incentive scheme, had helped push exports of smartphones significantly.

Nilanjan Banik, professor of economics at Mahindra University, said India's rise as a major iPhone exporter reflects both policy support and demand trends. "India is emerging as the world's largest seller and exporter of iPhones due to massive local manufacturing scale-up and booming domestic demand. Apple now produces about 25% of global iPhones in India," he said.

He added that shipments hit a record 14 million units in 2025, capturing 9% volume share and 28% value share, making India Apple's third-largest market. Rising incomes, premiumisation, easier financing, festive discounts, and expansion into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities supported growth. "India built a formidable supply chain ecosystem, especially in states like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, to sustain this growth further," said Banik.

CONTRAPUNTO

The evil that men do
lives after them

– MARK ANTONY, Julius Caesar

I To I

India-Israel ties have moved beyond business. As they say in Hebrew, sababa, that's great

There isn't a better word to describe India-Israel relationship than the Hebrew *'firgun'* – genuine pride in the accomplishments of another. And Modi's second visit has only strengthened it, like the sycamores of Tel Aviv. You can pore over MoUs and deals to grasp this. Or, pay heed to chants of "Modi" in Knesset, Netanyahu's recollection of his "first or second" date with his wife at an Indian restaurant, and Modi telling Israeli lawmakers he was born the day India recognised Israel in 1950. Clearly, this bilateral relationship has progressed beyond business, to bonhomie. And how sycamore-like its growth has been. Between 2014, when India really started warming to Israel, and now, both sides have come to trust each other deeply.

India is now Israel's second biggest trade partner in Asia, after China. Bilateral trade had zoomed to $10.8bn in 2022-23 before troubles in Red Sea made movement of goods difficult. India is also Israel's top arms buyer, and its strongest ally in the east. Netanyahu is keen on involving India in a new "hexagonal alliance" against "radical adversaries". There's also the old, Biden-era "I2U2" grouping of India, Israel, US and UAE for containing China in West Asia. The first time Modi visited Israel, in 2017, Netanyahu had spelt out his idea of bilateral ties as a mathematical equation: ITxIT = IT². *Tachles* – Hebrew for "to the point" – Indian Talent combined with Israeli Tech would define India-Israel future ties.

That's happening already. Mutual cooperation extends from agriculture to water treatment, education and space technology. But AI, cybersecurity and defence are major focus areas. Although Israel is a small country, it ranks 14th out of 139 countries on the Global Innovation Index. Which isn't surprising because it spends over 6% of GDP on R&D, as against only 0.7% in India. It has chip-making factories, and an impressive record in defence production.

So, as India and Israel deepen their engagement, what do they seek from each other? For Israel, India is invaluable as a vast market, and a friendly power. India would want greater access to defence tech, such as the Iron Dome missile shield. Israel's Hermes 900 drones are already made in India, but given the increasing importance of UAVs in war, it would want more advanced know-how too. The good news is that Israel seems happy to share its tech, although US approvals are needed in some cases. But for the relationship, intent is what matters most. *Sababa* – that's great.

Knock,Knock...Who's Fluent?

Teenagers are naturally attracted to foreign cultures, and thus languages. Encourage this

Policy is all very well, but what about pleasure? It gets little mention in politically charged shouting matches about the Centre's three-language policy, or its heated two-language rebuttals. In all the earnest talk of national identity, competitiveness and cultural preservation, joy barely gets a footnote. In classroom models too, language learning is more grim duty than delicious discovery. And yet, look around. Teenagers are picking up Korean because they adore BTS and binge-watch *Squid Game*. Others slip into Spanish thanks to *Despacito* and *Money Heist*. They are gaming with friends in Brazil, France and Italy, absorbing slang and syntax as casually as oxygen. No previous generation has had such easy, daily contact with peers across continents. For them, language isn't a syllabus; it's a soundtrack.

¡HOLA!
BONJOUR
KOREAN

To learn most naturally and efficiently, the language has to feel like an *invitation*. Like being pulled into a darkened cinema where unknown joys await. Neuroscience tells us the teenage brain releases more dopamine in response to rewarding experiences; motivation matters. So do our schools understand this? Do they fling open doors to the mysterious continents students long to explore, or do they quietly use nationality to fence them in? Remember that even as visa controls tighten in some corners of the world, the traffic of ideas remains gloriously free. As Michael Erard writes in *Babel No More*, that means our brains also have to flow, to stay plastic, stretch towards new sounds and skills. Multilingualism, after all, is a workout for neuroplasticity.

Yet, parents and teachers still wave away a student's fascination with some foreign culture as frivolous. But a language acquired through teenage passion compounds like an investment. Beyond all the possibilities of direct career enhancement, it sharpens those softer skills – empathy, flexibility, executive control – that employers will prize even more tomorrow. What joy and utility are joining together, let no school put asunder. So the student may forever sing, *Non, je ne regrette rien*.

Jeffrey and me

As more Big Names are linked to Epstein, the needle of suspicion moves closer home

Jug Suraiya

Shortly after Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, formerly known as Prince Randy Andy Andrew, was arrested by the police for his close association with sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, Bill Gates suddenly quit the AI summit in Delhi where he was scheduled to make a keynote address, his precipitate departure reportedly linked to his nominal connection with Epstein.

The so-called Epstein Files read like a Who's Who of Big Names, including Donald Trump, Elon Musk, Bill Clinton, Richard Branson, linguist Noam Chomsky, and motivational maestro Deepak Chopra.

Though in most cases, no wrongdoing has been ascribed to those so named, the very fact that they have been mentioned in Epstein's copious correspondence with innumerable people is enough to make headlines.

The vile Epstein seems to have been an indefatigable networker, corresponding with all and sundry with the frenzied dedication of an army of spam senders selling 3BHK apartments, or urging you to divulge your bank details so that they can deposit the ten-million-dollar prize you won in a lottery, even though you forgot to buy a ticket for it.

jugular*vein*

The Epstein list keeps growing. Who'll pop up next? The Pope? That's what worries me. Not that it might be the Pope. But that it might be someone much closer home. Me.

I've never communicated with the fellow. But suppose the chap's tried to contact me through emails or texts that unnoticed by me have gone into spam. Does that make me an accomplice by association, like an unwitting recipient of stolen goods?

True, Epstein connected only with capital-letter Big Names and I'm very much a lower-case small name. But suppose the bozo did so by mistake, or as an April Fool lark, or just to show he wasn't too snobbish to hobnob occasionally with hoi polloi, me being about as polloi as you can hoi?

So far, my lower-case name hasn't cropped up Epstein-wise. But as put by Nassim Nicholas Taleb – don't say *he's in the Epstein dossier too!* – no evidence of guilt is not evidence of no guilt.

So I might as well confess: Guilty, as not charged – yet.

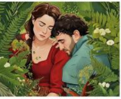
Hamnet: To Judge Or Not To Judge

The film raises the question, should we separate the artist from the art. Should we really let artists' tarnished personal records disqualify their achievements?

Indira Ghose

Hamnet, directed by Chloé Zhao, is a strong contender at this year's Oscars. It is a heart-wrenching fiction about Shakespeare and his wife, Agnes (or Anne), and the event that allegedly inspired the play *Hamlet*: the loss of their only son, Hamnet, at the age of eleven.

Agnes never forgives her husband for being absent at their child's death. Years later, she attends a performance of *Hamlet* and realises that he has transmuted his grief for a dead child into the grief of a Danish prince for a dead father.



Does any of this hold up in the cold light of historical truth? And if so, does it matter?

The documented facts are these: in 1582, Shakespeare, aged 18, married Anne Hathaway, aged 26. In 1583, Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna. Two years later the twins Judith and Hamnet were born, named after neighbouring friends. The next trace we have of Shakespeare stems from 1592, when a rival playwright published a sneering attack on the 'Upstart Crow' who was making a name for himself in London. In 1596, Hamnet died of unspecified causes.

Nothing is known about the emotional ties that shaped Shakespeare's life. The sonnets depict a love triangle between the poet, a young man and a dark lady, but generations of scholars have been unable to identify whom they correspond to. The affair may have taken place entirely in the poet's mind. Anne is explicitly mentioned only once: in Shakespeare's will, in which he bequeaths his "second-best bed" to her. The rest is speculation.

Every age reinvents Shakespeare in their own image. Based on a novel by Maggie O'Farrell, the film reclaims the shadowy figure of Shakespeare's wife as a free-spirited proto-feminist. *Hamnet* lets Shakespeare off lightly. He might be an absentee father, but redeems himself through his art. But the film raises a far broader question. What is the relationship between the life and the work? Can art be reduced to biography?

In the case of Shakespeare, reading art as a mirror of the artist's life fuels the ever-smouldering Shakespeare authorship controversy. Since the mid-19th century, legions of enthusiasts have set out to prove that the plays cannot have been written by a glovemaker's son.

No one from such a humble background, they argue, could have penned works that reveal such a wealth of knowledge about classical literature, court politics, law, or foreign countries. Alternative candidates are Sir Francis Bacon, philosopher and statesman, and Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, poet and patron of the arts. Ample documentary evidence attests to the authorship of Shakespeare.

In our age of conspiracy theories, however, the debate has gained fresh momentum. Even people who don't know a line from Shakespeare (apart from "To be or not to be") flaunt their insider wisdom and proclaim that Shakespeare wasn't Shakespeare.

Our fascination with the hidden lives of the famous is not a recent development. Over the years, lurid details about the moral failings of thinkers, writers and musicians have emerged. We are now all too familiar with Kant's racism and the "outlandish" experiments of Mahatma Gandhi, while Hemingway and Norman Mailer, Miles Davis and Michael Jackson have been exposed as despicable individuals.

Needless to say, even outstanding personalities should be accountable to justice for any crimes they commit. But to what extent does their tarnished personal record disqualify their achievements? Or do we need to distinguish between the person and their work, the artist and the art?

Moral outrage about the repellent behaviour of celebrated artists has reached a frenzied pitch in the era of social media, where the boundaries between private and public have collapsed. One of the latest casualties is Picasso. Today his work is discussed mainly in terms of misogyny and cultural appropriation.

Female artists too have come in for their share of vitriol. Joni Mitchell and Doris Lessing are castigated for abandoning their children, Virginia Woolf for her antisemitism. What we overlook is that we too are flawed, fragmented, and contradictory beings. The lives of the famous harbour sordid secrets in the same way as do our own.

While we live in a world in which the rich and the powerful operate with impunity, the demand for moral purity has established a stranglehold over the arts. Dead or alive, artists are expected to conform to a high moral standard and promote worthy sentiments. The art is equated with the artist. But artworks are much more than a sublimated version of the artist's biography. And rather than confirming our opinions, powerful art unsettles us by evoking deeply ambivalent emotions – and accordingly, captures the conflicts and moral complexities of being human. This is why art from the past still speaks to us.

The death of Hamnet may or may not have inspired *Hamlet*. The play is, however, immeasurably richer than a tearjerker. It wrestles with dark moral dilemmas: guilt and resentment, the desire to break free from family bonds and nostalgia for a lost Eden.

"Remember me", the ghost urges. What he demands is not remembrance, but revenge. Self-deluded and posturing though Hamlet might be, he resists to the extent possible. Once he embarks on a spree of violence, like all revengers, his actions become increasingly dubious.

Set in a surveillance state in which corruption and betrayal are rampant, the play depicts a disintegrating moral order, a world without clear answers. It is a play for our times.

The writer is former professor, English Literature, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

IT ALL GOES BACK TO COLUMBUS

In MAGA's book, Western civilisation has no discontents. If only Europe would agree

Rupa Sengupta

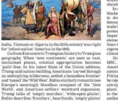
Trump recently said Europeans would 'all be speaking German' had America not 'won' WWII. By oversight or design, he didn't acknowledge Britain's and Soviet Union's big role in wresting Allied victory. Also ignored was the historical context and pillars of US's postwar might. Emerging from WWII as a global superpower, US needed and cultivated transatlantic partners to bolster its dominance and help fight Soviet communism. Whether through the Marshall Plan or Nato's formation, America served itself by safeguarding Europe.

In Trump-speak, though, Europe owes America, Atlas that's shrugged. It must refund US for 'globalism' – post-1945 trade and collective security arrangements that boosted US power-projection. Besides 'burden-sharing', US's eternally indebted allies must also satisfy every demand of their Trumpian protector-in-name, one that wants maximum power with minimum responsibility. For instance, they must cede Greenland even if, deprioritising Europe's security and Ukraine's deliverance, US defence strategists write off Putin-led Russia's revanchism as a 'manageable threat to Nato's eastern members'.

Most important, Europe must help America revitalise the West, jointly defending their 'sacred inheritance'. At the recent Munich Security Conference (MSC), secretary of state Marco Rubio lauded 'Western civilisation', the 'greatest'-ever, expanded by explorers, missionaries, pilgrims and soldiers – read: superior Western science, faith and arms. US could go solo with the task of civilisational renewal, he said, but transatlantic fates were 'connected' spiritually and culturally. So US preferred if its allies abandoned deluded internationalism, and embraced their shared heritage: the empire-building, Christianity-spreading Europe whose ships crossed oceans and birthed America.

According to Rubio, in 1945 Europe lay prostrate for the first time 'since the age of Columbus'. But what had hastened the 'decline' of 'great Western empires'? No, he didn't mention disastrous great power rivalries, scrambles for land and resources, arms races, Hitler's abominations, or the economic strain, social disruption and moral calamity of barbaric world wars that wrecked faith in progress based on Western 'rationality'. He blamed, in the same breath, 'godless communist revolutions' and 'anti-colonial uprisings'.

Why are 'evil' commies lumped with people Occidental powers had subjugated across the world? Both apparently imperilled the hitherto-'expanding' West, one by challenging free societies, the other by wanting to be free! Rubio is fine with 13 American colonies attaining independence – perhaps because they fought not imperialism per se but specifically the British empire, as historian Bernard Porter noted, partly to gain 'freedom to imperialise their own continent'. Ergo, what was wrong for, say, 'anti-colonial' India, Vietnam or Algeria in the 20th century was right for 'infant nation' America in the 18th.



Go from Eurocentric Trumpian history to Trumpian geography. When 'new continents' are seen as vast, unclaimed places, colonial appropriation becomes 'guilt'-free. In his latest State of the Union address, Trump said nation-building Americans 'carved through an unforgiving wilderness, settled a boundless frontier' and 'tamed' the 'Wild West'. Rubio similarly romanticises Europe's seemingly bloodless conquest of the 'New World', and American settlers' westward expansion. Trump talks of 'empty marshes', 'wide-open plains'; Rubio describes 'frontiers', heartlands, 'empty plains' and interiors shaped by industrious Euro-Americans. Neither mentions native populations, upon whose misery, displacement and/or extermination empires – and America – were built.

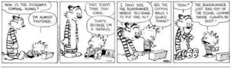
Rubio extols Spain-payrolled Italian explorer Columbus's 'adventure' as defining 'the imagination of our pioneer nation'. He seemingly forgets Columbus set sail in 1492 to find the 'Indies', Asian civilisations that existed before 'America' was born. The Caribbean lands he stumbled upon – heralding colonisation of the Americas – weren't unpeopled. Nor did the systematic exploitation and enslavement his 'discovery of America' triggered go uncontested by Christian colonists. Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas, for one, witnessed carnage firsthand. Relinquishing his slave-driving estate, he tirelessly petitioned against 16th century Spanish conquistadors' brutality towards indigenous peoples.

Expectedly, for Trumpists, *who* lives where seems irrelevant if 'America First' can straddle *where* they live. Hence Gaza is 'real estate' rather than home to two million-plus Gazans. Mineral-rich Greenland is a 'piece of ice' 56,000-plus Greenlanders should let America acquire. And Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean should submit to Donroe doctrinaires.

In a not-unrelated ideological takeover bid based on blackening the West's accomplishments, Europe's asked to don ethnonationalist robes. Scientific enquiry, democracy, human rights, secularism, anti-militarism, trade's peace dividends, media freedom, environmental protection – these hard-wrought values, however imperfectly upheld, are denigrated. Indulging far-right elements, Trumpists rap anyone across ideological lines who defends rules-based coexistence, or red-flags supremacism, expansionism, wealth concentration, climate scepticism or disease risks.

Not everyone favours whitewashing history. At MSC, German chancellor Friedrich Merz warned America of the 'limits' of unilateralism, contrasting autocracy's followers with democracy's partners. Pitting European solidarity against big power politics, he rejected 'hegemonic fantasies' that once led Germany astray. 'Might-makes-right' took his country to a 'dark place', down a path to the 'bitter' end, he said – alluding to the catastrophe of WWII. Telling his multilingual audience about this enduring lesson never again 'to go it alone', Merz championed Europe – speaking in German. A point Trump should note.

Calvin & Hobbes


HOW IS THE DIORAMA COMING ALONG?
I'M ALMOST FINISHED.
THAT DIDN'T TAKE TOO LONG.
THAT'S BECAUSE I'M A GENIUS.
I DON'T SEE THE ROADRUNNER. WEREN'T YOU GOING TO PUT ONE IN?
SEE THE COTTON BALLS I GLUED DOWN?
YEAH?
THE ROADRUNNER JUST RAN OUT OF THE SCENE, LEAVING THOSE CLOUDS OF DUST!

Sacred*space*

How important it is for us to recognise and celebrate our heroes and she-roes!

Maya Angelou

Democracy Of Silence: When Not Choosing Is A Choice

Sonal Srivastava

In Indic epistemological parlance, *abhava*, absence, is not a mere void. It is a distinct way of examining reality through the lens of nonexistence. Take, for instance, the air inside a pot. When the pot is merely a lump of clay, air inside the pot is absent but only in a relational sense. Hence, when the Supreme Court recently observed that some mechanism, not necessarily punitive, could be devised to make voting compulsory, it raised a deeper philosophical question: Is abstention not a gentler way to express disapproval?

Abstention is a form of censure that can speak louder than words. Take for example, an elephant in the room. It's absent yet it cannot be ignored. The dictionary meaning of the word 'abstention' is 'the fact of not voting in favour of or against someone or something.' Hence, like, *abhava*, abstention is not mere absence from voting; it could be many things: a silent critique of available choices, a protest against binaries, or even a philosophical refusal to reduce one's conscience to pressing a button.

The act of choosing is inherently dualistic: civic agency must be expressed through a preference for one option over another. For a sage in *Brahmn Samadhi*, this may appear futile, for he knows that "there is no two," and therefore no choice is to be made. The ultimate Truth includes play of opposites, yet one who chooses the Divine rises above *dualwood*, the realm of dualities. Such a person, Gita says, is a *Sthitaprajna* – even-minded in victory and defeat, joy and sorrow, love and hate, trust and disgust.

For the spiritually inclined, voting may thus pose a dualistic proposition. It could be examined whether participation in structured dualisms compromises a nondual orientation? Or is abstention a way of remaining equanimous?

For many young citizens, political binaries may feel outdated, too simplistic to capture the complexity of their concerns. Sam Altman recently suggested that young people should not automatically defer to older generations, as the pace of technological change and AI are blurring boundaries in economic and informational spaces. Old maps no longer match the terrain. Yet the dominant political narrative in India is rife with hypernationalism, marked by exaggerated patriotism, aggressive assertion of religious identity, and hostility towards perceived 'others'. In this framework, abstention, like the epistemological concept of *abhava*, is meaningful relational absence.

Nations run on engines of competing nationalisms that must harvest patriotism for fuel. "The truth is that spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in centre of Western nationalism; its basis is not social co-operation," says Rabindranath Tagore. Jacques Derrida, a French philosopher, took upon himself the task of deconstructing the nation itself. The nation is not an eternal essence; it is a *narrative*, a story told about common language, memory, and destiny. Jürgen Habermas wrote the *Postnational Constellation* suggesting a world where democracy and polity must adapt to global interdependence, moving beyond the limits of exclusive national identity.

Abhava is not a barren void but a meaningful absence: a shift in relational form. When clay becomes a pot, its configuration, function, and field of relations within which it exists change. In much the same way, postnationalism does not signal the demise of sovereign nations; it gestures towards the need for transformation. It calls for a recalibrated response to certain crises that exceed the moral and geographic limits of a nation-state.

"WE ALL KNOW HOW CHILL (CAPTAIN) MITCHELL SANTNER IS AND ALSO HOW HIS MIND WORKS. HE LEADS THROUGH PERFORMANCES AND WORK ETHIC. HE BACKS YOU AND MAKES YOU FEEL TEN FEET TALL AND BULLETPROOF." —Rachin Ravindra, NZ

Welcome Return To Form For Opener Abhishek As India Set Up Virtual QF Against West Indies With Thumping Win Over Zimbabwe

BACK IN BUSINESS

MUCH-NEEDED FIFTY: Abhishek Sharma flicks one to the fence during his knock in Chennai

"I just wanted to spend some time on the pitch. I haven't taken 10-12 balls so far. Special mention to the team. They just backed me, they were just reminding me that your time is not far." —Abhishek Sharma

Dwaipayan.Datta@timesofindia.com

Chennai: It was a day everything went according to plan for India, starting with South Africa's easy win against West Indies in Ahmedabad earlier in the day. That result smoothed out the rough edges of this Super 8 Group 1 and meant India would just have to win their remaining games to safely book a semis berth. And against a team like Zimbabwe, which is not quite ready for a stage as big as this, Suryakumar's boys did the needful. As thousands of mobiles flickered in the MA Chidambaram Stadium stands, India got their campaign back on track, winning by 72 runs and setting up a direct 'quarterfinal' against the West Indies at Eden Gardens on Sunday.

With a pleasant evening breeze blowing across the Chepauk, the fans never stopped partying. They had their reasons. The much-loved Abhishek Sharma came back to some sort of form with a 30-ball 55, new CSK signing Sanju Samson punched a quickfire 24 and the entire middle order got some good hits on a batting beauty. Zimbabwe, though, did make things easier for India. From choosing to bowl after winning the toss to bowling pedestrian pacers in the Powerplay to dropping catches at crucial junctures, the African minnows were just the team India would have liked at this stage of the tournament.

Towards the back end, they kept delivering lollipops in trying for the yorker and were thrashed for 17 sixes in the process. A total of 256/4 was comfortably India's highest in the T20 World Cup, going past their previous best of 218. It was way beyond Zimbabwe's reach and they didn't seem too interested in the chase. Zimbabwe instead chose to bat out the 20 overs and get some big-stage experience against top quality bowlers. Right-handed opener Brian Bennett (97 not out off 54 balls) played an innings of great quality that may stand him in good stead against some other opposition on some other day. But for now it's the end of the road for Zimbabwe.

The quality of opposition notwithstanding, India had to get the runs and all eyes were on the recycled opening partnership of Sanju and Abhishek.

The left-hander, woefully out of form till now, wasn't tested with off-spin, his nemesis so far in the tournament, in the Powerplay and he cashed in on it.

The blitz, though, was started by Samson, who punched a six off the back-foot over mid-off off left-arm pacer Richard Ngarava. Sanju was tested with short balls — he hit a few too — but fell to a similar delivery. However, with the score reading 48 off 3.4 overs, he had already done his job.

Thereafter, it was Abhishek's turn to show that the hard work put in by him at the nets on Tuesday would pay dividends. The southpaw kept his head still and didn't try to pre-meditate his shots. He also didn't show the pacers his stumps and didn't look to charge down the track. Instead he held his shape, stayed in his crease and looked to play the ball straight. Of course, there was nothing in the Zimbabwe attack that was really challenging but the Punjab cricketer kept his side of the bargain.

The crowd erupted in joy; the "Abhishek, Abhi-shek" chants grew louder as his beautifully crisp shots kept the scoreboard galloping. Even though India raced away to 80 in the Powerplay, Abhishek's half-century, coming off 28 balls, was his second slowest in T20Is. Instead of looking for over-boundaries and power all the time, Abhishek didn't mind the occasional boundary (4x4, 4x6). He played the field with great dexterity as India heaved a sigh of relief.

For reasons better known to Zimbabwe, skipper Sikandar Raza bowled only six overs of spin. He himself didn't complete his quota despite dismissing Ishan Kishan while the other two shared three. They conceded 56 — a little over nine — while the pacers went anywhere between 10 to 20.

Hardik (50* off 23 balls) and Tilak (44* off 16 balls), batting at No. 6, found themselves back in the flow. But things may get tougher going forward.

HOW THEY STAND

Teams	M	W	L	NR	Pts	NRR
Super 8s, Group 1						
SA	2	2	0	0	4	2.89
WI	2	1	1	0	2	1.79
Ind	2	1	1	0	2	-0.10
Zim	2	0	2	0	0	-4.47
Super 8s, Group 2						
Eng	2	2	0	0	4	1.49
NZ	2	1	0	1	3	3.05
Pak	2	0	1	1	1	-0.46
SL	2	0	2	0	0	-2.80

Note: Top two teams from each group qualify for semis

T20 WORLD CUP HIGHEST TOTALS

Score	Overs	RPO	Team	Vs	Venue	Date
260/6	20.0	13	SL	Ken	Johannesburg	14.9.2007
256/4	20.0	12.8	Ind	Zim	Chennai	26.2.2026
254/6	20.0	12.7	WI	Zim	Mumbai (WS)	23.2.2026
235/5	20.0	11.7	Ire	Oman	Colombo (SSC)	14.2.2026
230/8	20.0	11.7	Eng	SA	Mumbai (WS)	18.3.2016
229/4	20.0	11.4	SA	Eng	Mumbai (WS)	18.3.2016

SCOREBOARD

India: S Samson c Burl b Muzarabani 24, A Sharma c Raza b Maposa 55, I Kishan c Ngarava b Raza 38, S Yadav c Musekiwa b Ngarava 33, H Pandya not out 50, T Varma not out 44; **Extras: (lb4, w7, nb1) 12; Total: (4 wkts) 256; FoW:** 1-48, 2-120, 3-150, 4-172; **Bowling:** Ngarava 4-0-62-1, Muzarabani 4-0-43-1, Maposa 2-0-40-1, Evans 4-0-52-0, Raza 3-0-29-1, Bennett 2-0-16-0, Burl 1-0-10-0.

Zimbabwe: B Bennett not out 97, T Marumani c Kishan b Axar 20, D Myers c Varma b Varun 6, S Raza c Abhishek b Arshdeep 31, R Burl lbw b Arshdeep 0, T Munyonga b Arshdeep 11, T Musekiwa c Samson b Dube 7, B Evans not out 1; **Extras: (b1, lb1, nb2, w7) 11; Total: (6 wkts) 184; FoW:** 1-44, 2-72, 3-144, 4-144, 5-162, 6-173; **Bowling:** Arshdeep 4-0-24-3, Pandya 3-0-21-0, Bumrah 3-0-21-0, Varun 4-0-35-1, Axar 4-0-35-1, Dube 2-0-46-1.

Result: India won by 72 runs

1 Zimbabwe have become the first team to concede 250+ in successive T20Is. West Indies had scored 254/6 against them in Mumbai on Feb 23, 2026.

80/1 This is the third instance of India posting an 80+ score in the Powerplay in the T20 WC.

55 Abhishek Sharma's first fifty in the T20 WC is his 9th in T20Is. This is his second-highest score vs Zimbabwe behind the 100 off 47 balls in Harare on July 7, 2024.

TIME TO ASK APOLLO
SLEEP!
Sleeping under 6 hours for a week can raise stress by 30% and impact focus.
Scan to check your sleep pattern
For any Health Query Chat with
Ask Apollo

One foot in semis, NZ look to topple England

Vishal.Menon@timesofindia.com

FACE-OFF
ENG VS NZ
TV TIME 7PM
STAR SPORTS
JIOHOTSTAR

HEAD TO HEAD

ENG	NZ
17	10

LAST FIVE MATCHES

ENG	W	W	W	W	L
NZ	W	NR	W	L	W

VENUE: COLOMBO

WEATHER 27°C

ODDS

ENG	NZ
8/10	6/4

New Zealand have built their reputation on resilience and clinical execution. Coach Rob Walter reckons it is the "street-smart" quality of the side that can prove decisive against England as the Black Caps chase a semifinal berth in the T20 World Cup.

Friday night's Super 8 clash in Colombo offers contrasting scenarios. England are already through to the final four while New Zealand control their destiny. A win will send them to the top of Group 2 and confirm their spot in the semifinals. A loss, however, would potentially reopen the race, leaving Pakistan with a slim net run-rate opportunity if they beat Sri Lanka with a resounding margin on Saturday.

On Wednesday, New Zealand were reeling at 84/6 against Sri Lanka before Mitchell Santner and Cole McConchie produced a compelling turnaround, guiding them to 168/7. It proved to be the cornerstone of their crushing 61-run win. Walter credits this to the team's excellent problem-solving abilities.

"We've always been excellent problem-solvers," he said. "We're street-smart, read conditions quickly and find a method that works." That flexibility could prove vital on a spin-friendly turning track at the Premadasa Stadium.

New Zealand's slow-bowlers — Santner, Rachin Ravindra, Glenn Phillips and Cole McConchie — will test an England batting order led by their irrepressible captain Harry Brook.

7 T20 World Cup games have been contested between the two teams from 2007 and 2022. England have won 4 — one each in 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2022 while New Zealand have won three: one each in 2007, 2014 and 2021.

110 Jos Buttler's average while totalling 110 runs in three innings (twice not out), including 73 in Brisbane on Nov 1, 2022 — the highest among batters in T20 WC matches involving the two countries.

Peerless Proteas storm into semifinal

Markram, Pacers Fashion Dominating 9-Wkt Win As West Indies Disappoint

Sabu.Cherian@timesofindia.com

Ahmedabad: Even before India took the field against Zimbabwe in Chennai on Thursday evening, South Africa had done their bit to calm the nerves of Indian fans in the afternoon. South African captain Aiden Markram produced an exhibition of sublime ball-striking with an unbeaten 82 off 46 balls to take his team to a nine-wicket win after pacers Kagiso Rabada, Lungi Ngidi and Corbin Bosch ensured West Indies could only post 176/8 on a flat track.

Chasing down the target in 16.1 overs not only sealed South Africa's spot in the semifinal, it also brought down West Indies' net run rate to 1.791. The result must have taken the pressure off the Indian team, which suffered a humiliating loss against South Africa last Sunday.

In pursuit of 177, Markram laid down the marker in the Powerplay by racing to 43 off 20 balls. Quinton de Kock joined the party by smashing pacer Shamar Joseph for 16 runs in the final over of the Powerplay as South Africa scored 69 in six overs. De Kock fell to Roston Chase for 47 off 24 in the eighth over but then the scoreboard read 96/1. Ryan Rickelton joined Markram to score unbeaten 45 off 28 balls and finish the job.

Earlier, the West Indies threatened to take off in the first two overs of the match, putting up 29 runs on the board. But Rabada and Ngidi pulled things back, reducing West Indies to 52/4. Rabada's 2/22, Ngidi's 3/30 and Bosch's 2/31 had West Indies in dire straits at 83/7 by the 11th over. Jason Holder and Romario Shepherd played the rescue act with an 89-run partnership in 9.3 overs.

Shepherd, coming out to bat at No. 9, finished unbeaten on 52 off 37 while Holder was run out in the final over for 49 off 31 balls. Rabada hurt West Indies' chances by dismissing captain Shai Hope for 16 and Shimron Hetmyer for two in the third over. Ngidi then sent back Brandon King and Chase. On a day when Marco Jansen (0/50) and left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj (0/43) were off-colour, Ngidi's dipping slower balls and Bosch's pinpoint yorkers meant West Indies managed only 13 runs in the last two overs.

Yogesh Chavada

82* Unbeaten knock by Aiden Markram, his third unbeaten score in the 80s in T20Is. All three have come this year — 86* vs WI in Paarl on Jan 27 & 86* vs NZ in Ahmedabad on Feb 14.

93.33 Success percent enjoyed by Markram, winning 14 out of 15 contested, the best of any captain in the T20 World Cup.

89 Runs put on by West Indies' Jason Holder and Shepherd for the eighth wicket, a record for the eighth wicket or below in the T20 World Cup.

SCOREBOARD

West Indies: B King c de Kock b Ngidi 21, S Hope c de Kock b Rabada 16, S Hetmyer c Maharaj b Rabada 2, R Powell c Brevis b Ngidi 9, R Chase b Ngidi 2, S Rutherford c de Kock b Bosch 12, J Holder run out 49, M Forde c Rickelton b Bosch 11, R Shepherd not out 52, G Motie not out 0; **Extras: (w2) 2; Total: (8 wkts) 176; FoW:** 1-28, 2-31, 3-41, 4-43, 5-68, 6-71, 7-83, 8-172; **Bowling:** Maharaj 4-0-43-0, Jansen 4-0-50-0, Rabada 4-0-22-2, Ngidi 4-0-30-3, Bosch 4-0-31-2.

South Africa: A Markram not out 82, Q de Kock c Holder b Chase 47, R Rickelton not out 45; **Extras: (w2, nb1) 3; Total: (1 wkt, 16.1 overs) 177; FoW:** 1-95; **Bowling:** Forde 3-0-30-0, Shepherd 2-0-22-0, Holder 3.1-0-31-0, Joseph 2-0-24-0, Motie 2-0-24-0, Chase 4-0-46-1.

Result: SA won by 9 wkts

'Any win against a top team drains you'

Sabu.Cherian@timesofindia.com

Ahmedabad: South Africa have emerged as a strong contender for the World Cup title, but Aiden Markram feels the campaign has been a tiring one. "New Zealand, India and West Indies are quality team and to put in strong performances against sides like that gives you confidence," Markram said.

"But it honestly doesn't feel easy. Every game drains you. The intensity is seriously high and you know things can change very quickly in T20 cricket. You wake up the next morning and it can all be over in a couple of days."

Markram credited the bowlers for keeping the big-hitting West Indies to 176/8. He was effusive in his praise for allrounder Corbin Bosch, who nailed perfect yorkers in the final over and gave away just five runs. "He keeps it really simple, trains smartly and doesn't give himself too many options," Markram said.

West Indies captain Shai Hope backed the aggressive batting approach even though the top order collapsed on Thursday. "There's always some element of risk whenever you're batting. So if you want to challenge the opposition, then you've got to find runs, especially on a surface like that which is so good. You still have to measure the risks in some way. If we just bat deep and only get 150-160 on a surface like that, it is always going to be tough work," Hope said.

Amid the noise, ousted SL search for answers

In Unprecedented Move, Captain Shanaka Asks Govt To Step In & Stop Social-Media-Propelled 'Negativity' Around Team

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Pic: AP, IANS

BELOW PAR: Tim Seifert celebrates Kusal Mendis's dismissal; dejected fans (right) look on after Sri Lanka's loss

"I'm sorry," Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka said, his voice low but firm. "We didn't give our fans what they deserved."

Under the glare of the Khettarama floodlights, Sri Lanka's T20 World Cup dreams had just flickered out. A soul-crushing 61-run loss to New Zealand sealed their exit from this showpiece tournament. As Shanaka spoke at the post-match presentation ceremony, the packed stands at R. Premadasa Stadium watched in stunned silence. From the sea-salted ramparts of Galle to the sleepless high-rises of Colombo and the sunburned coast of Mirissa, a nation had gone into mourning.

While offering his apology to fans for the team's "embarrassing" performance, Shanaka oddly appealed to the Lankan government to step in and stop the atmosphere of negativity in the dressing room. "There was too much negativity around this team," he said. "You can try to stay positive inside the dressing room but outside, the noise never stops.

"Most of the time we mainly hear negative stuff. There is a negative environment created from the outside. That's a disadvantage for cricket in Sri Lanka. At least for the players coming up next, if the government could interfere and stop those (spurring negativity), I believe that will be a great help for our mental health," he added in an unprecedented request.

Shanaka spoke of the microphones clustered beyond the gates, of commentary from those, in his words, "had not even watched the game".

In a country where passions run deep, criticism over Sri Lanka's lacklustre performances have turned into a raging storm. Results were unkind long before the tournament. Since mid-last year, Sri Lanka's limited-overs form had meandered into no-man's land. By the time the T20 World Cup arrived, confidence was already fragile.

Shanaka admitted he and the team management misread the Khettarama surface, expecting truer batting tracks. Instead, spin gripped early and decisively. "Our best batters are here," he insisted. "No one is here by force. But sometimes you don't get the conditions you expect."

The Sri Lankan captain's comments did little to mask his batters' glaring incompetence. Against New Zealand, they showed little intent and no clear blueprint. At times, there was a streak of recklessness. They struggled to pierce the field, failed to rotate strike and allowed pressure to stifle them. It seemed the innings was stuck in first gear.

Injuries have compounded the slide. Wily spinner Wanindu Hasaranga tore a hamstring in the opening match. Pacer Matheesha Pathirana strained a calf days later. Eshan Malinga had been ruled out before the first ball was bowled.

"Fitness must be non-negotiable," Shanaka said, acknowledging a deeper, recurring fault line.

Former captain Kumar Sangakkara said Sri Lanka were in danger of becoming irrelevant in the cricket world. "There is a lot of work to be done at all levels to course correct," he wrote on X.

On Wednesday, Sri Lanka lost more than just a match. They lost momentum, belief and perhaps a measure of faith between the team and public.

20/2 Sri Lanka's Powerplay score in their Super 8 game against New Zealand, the lowest by any team in this period of play in this World Cup. Nepal's 22/3 against West Indies was the previous lowest. It is also Sri Lanka's second-lowest score ever in this period of play, behind the 18/3 against India in Dharamshala on Feb 27, 2022.
–Note: Rajesh Kumar

"This is the only sport we have and I don't know if we'll be able to protect it. If you look outside the stadium, you'll see how many people are standing outside with mics and people will say stuff without having watched the match. Why spread this negativity? Yes, we lost a World Cup and we know the reasons. Everyone has concerns. More than talking about that and correcting it, the negativity has come to the fore. At least for the players coming up next, if the government could interfere and stop those (spurring negativity), that will be great for our mental health."
—Dasun Shanaka
SRI LANKA CAPTAIN

"There is a lot of hurt all round. The fans are devastated, disappointed, angry. The players are hurting badly too. I have been in similar dressing rooms. It's not easy. But this responsibility comes with the turf. It's a burden and a great privilege to represent your country and your people. There is a lot of work to be done at all levels to course correct. We can't do the same things over and over and expect different results when the cricket world around us has evolved so quickly. We haven't adapted and the danger is irrelevance."
—Kumar Sangakkara
FORMER SRI LANKA SKIPPER

PM questions NCERT lapse, Pradhan vows action

Modi Flags Issue During Cabinet Meet

Times News Network

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The chapter on role of judiciary in society will be rewritten and made available from 2026-27 session

New Delhi: Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Thursday vowed to take action against those responsible for the reference to judicial corruption in an NCERT textbook, amid indications of Prime Minister **Narendra Modi**'s unhappiness over what he considers to be a grave lapse.

Modi is learnt to have flagged the controversial inclusion of corruption among judiciaries in the theme dealing with problems facing administration of justice in the new NCERT Class VIII social science textbook. "What are we teaching Class VIII children about judicial corruption?" sources quoted the PM as saying at the meting of the Union Cabinet on Tuesday.

As the NCERT scrambled to stem the fallout from the Supreme Court's fury over the issue, taking off the book's e-version from its website and figuring out ways to get hold of the 32 hard copies that had been sold, Pradhan offered an unconditional apology.

He affirmed respect for the judiciary while promising to fix accountability and take action against those who drafted the controversial chapter. The issue centres on Chapter 4 — "Role of the Judiciary in Our Society" — in the new social science textbook (Part 2) brought out by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). Edited by Michel Danino and Alok Prasanna, the chapter listed corruption, massive case pendency and shortage of judges as challenges faced by the judicial system. The controversy escalated on Thursday when the Supreme Court observed that there appeared to be a "well-orchestrated conspiracy" to defame the judiciary and imposed a "blanket ban" on the NCERT book, ordering that all physical and digital copies be seized.

Meanwhile, NCERT, when asked, said the e-version of the textbook was "not uploaded online".

"Thirty-two physical copies were sold before distribution was halted" — a figure also cited by the solicitor general in court. The council to a question on how it was tracking and recalling the already-sold books, a senior NCERT official said, "As all the books have been sold through NCERT depots, they were tracked and majority of them have been already recalled." The chapter will now be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities and made available from the 2026-27 academic session.

On the top court's observations, Pradhan said he was "deeply saddened by what had happened, stressed that there was no intention to insult the judiciary" and added that "an inquiry would be conducted to identify those responsible". He added that circulation of the textbooks was immediately put on hold once the issue came to light and that the govt would fully comply with the Supreme Court's directions.

Following stern remarks from the SC that it would not allow "anyone on earth" to tarnish the judiciary's integrity, NCERT pulled the textbook from its website. The council on Wednesday apologised for "inappropriate content" and said the chapter would be rewritten in consultation with appropriate authorities before being reissued, even as officials said tighter review mechanisms for future textbooks are now being examined.

SC: Ensure all copies, hard or soft, are seized, removed from public access

▸Continued from P 1

A shot has been fired mindlessly and the judiciary is bleeding. The design was to defame the judiciary by telling students, their parents and teachers, the entire society, about corruption. As the head of the institution, it is my duty to protect the institution from such macabre and baseless insinuations," CJI Kant said.

The bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant, Justice Joymalya Bagchi and Vipul M Pancholi ordered, "The NCERT in coordination with the Union and state education depts is directed to ensure that all copies of the book (hard or soft) currently in circulation, whether held in storage, retail outlets, or educational institutions, are seized and removed from public access. Compliance be filed." Further, it said, "It shall be personal responsibility of NCERT director and the principal of every school where the book has reached to effectuate immediate seizure and sealing of all copies of the book in their premises and submit a compliance report. Ensure that no instruction is imparted based on the subject book. Principal secretaries of all states are to comply."

It asked the NCERT to file compliance within two weeks.

"As an abundant precaution, a complete blanket ban is hereby imposed on any further publication, reprinting or digital dissemination of the book. Any attempt to circumvent this order through electronic means or altered titles shall be seen as direct interference, wilful breach and defiance of directions," it said.

The CJI-headed bench directed NCERT to reveal the name of persons who were entrusted with preparing the textbook, their credentials and submit the minutes of the meetings where the contents of the book were deliberated upon and finalised. The court posted the matter for further hearing on March 11.

The bench said the manner in which corruption in judiciary is portrayed in the book by imputing several complaints against judges, a deliberate impression was given that the judiciary has not acted upon those complaints. The solicitor general said the way pendency figures are quoted to mention in the book that 'justice delayed is justice denied' appears to teach the children that justice is denied in India. Nothing could be further from truth, he said.

Senior advocates Kapil Sibal, A M Singhvi and Vikas Singh termed the portion in the textbook scandalous, calculated and designed to selectively target judiciary to denigrate its image.

CJI Kant said politicians, bureaucrats and other professionals are being regularly convicted for various offences and yet judiciary has been blatantly targeted. He said, "The authors forgot that judiciary has played a stellar role in protecting the Constitution, the fundamental rights of citizens and passed series of orders over the last 75 years to protect democracy, not to mention its stellar role in making it possible to provide free legal aid to poor and marginalised sections of the society."

The CJI said on the day the news report was published, the SC secretary general had sought a clarification from the NCERT director. The response was appalling and contemptuous as the person tried to defend the book and its contents. The bench said, "It seems to us that the choice of words and expressions in the book may not be a simplictor (sic) inadvertence or bona fide error. We may, however, hasten to add that we do not propose to initiate suo motu proceedings to stifle any legitimate criticism or to stop any individual from exercising the right to scrutinise public institutions, including the judiciary."

Have great respect, pride for judiciary: BJP

BJP said on Thursday that it has great respect and pride for the judiciary, comments that came in the wake of a raging controversy over the reference to judicial corruption in an NCERT text book which has drawn anger from the Supreme Court. "We also do 'pranam' to the judiciary. Given the impartiality with which the Indian judiciary functions, we should always respect and stand with the judiciary of the country," BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra said at a presser. So far as the NCERT issue is concerned, it's a sensitive matter, he said. "There is no other institution, I would say not only in India but in this whole world, that is as independent and as deserving as the Indian judiciary is," he said. "We all have a feeling of great respect and pride towards the Indian judiciary, and this is the feeling in everyone's heart." TNN

PM Modi first leader to cross 100m followers on Instagram

New Delhi: PM Modi Thursday became the first world leader and politician to cross 100 million followers on Instagram, marking a new milestone in his global digital footprint and online political communication.

Modi, who joined the platform in 2014, has steadily built one of the world's most-followed political accounts. His follower count is now more than double that of US President Donald Trump, who stands second with around 43.2 million followers on Instagram.

Among other international leaders, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto has about 15 million followers, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has 14.4 million, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has 11.6 million, and Argentine President Javier Milei has about 6.4 million followers. The combined following of these five leaders remains lower than Modi's individual tally.

In India, UP CM Yogi Adityanath has around 16.1 million followers, while Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has about 12.6 million. The milestone comes alongside strong global approval ratings for the PM. TNN

Now, cancel air ticket for free within 48 hours of booking

Times News Network

New Delhi: Airlines will now provide a "look-in option" for a period of 48 hours after booking a ticket during which a passenger can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except fare difference, if the departure date is at least 7 and 15 days hence for domestic and international flights, respectively. Airlines will need to ensure refunds within 14 days and they will no longer be allowed to levy any charge for a name correction being made within 24 hours of the booking being made on their website.

Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has from Thursday revised refund rules and introduced passenger-friendly measures in what is often a painful process for travellers.

"In case of purchase of ticket through travel agent/portal, onus of refund shall lie with airlines as agents are their appointed representatives. Airlines shall ensure that the refund process is completed within 14 working days," the amended rules issued by DGCA chief Faiz Ahmed Kidwai say.

DGCA has revised refund rules and introduced passenger-friendly measures

"In the event of ticket cancellations due to a medical emergency where the passenger or a family member listed on the same PNR gets admitted/hospitalised during the travel period, airlines may provide either a refund or a credit shell. For all other situations, refunds will be issued once an opinion on the passenger's fitness to travel certificate is received from an airline's aerospace medicine specialist/DGCA empanelled aerospace medicine specialist," reads another amendment introduced in the rules.

The regulator has ruled that airlines "shall not levy any additional charge for correction in the name of the same person when the error is pointed out by the passenger within 24 hours of making the booking, when the ticket is booked directly through the airline website".

About the 48-hour lock-in period, the amended rule says: "During this period, passengers can cancel or amend the ticket without any additional charges, except for the normal prevailing fare for the revised flight for which the ticket is sought to be amended. This facility shall not be available for a flight whose departure is less than 7 days for domestic flight and 15 days for international flight from booking date when ticket is booked directly through the airline website. Beyond 48 hours of initial booking time, this option is not available and the passenger has to pay relevant cancellation fees for amendment."

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Teens skip board exam to marry, cops rush them to exam centres

Varanasi: A teen couple that skipped their Class 12 UP board exam and reached a temple to tie the knot in Chandauli district got into trouble when the boy's family came to know about the plan and called the police, **reports Rajeev Dikshit**.

Cops rushed them to their exam centres first. Later, the girl, found to be two months shy of 18, was taken to the child welfare committee where her statement was recorded. Both the girl and the boy (18) were allowed to go home.

Hailing from the same village, the couple had been in a relationship for several months. The girl was due to appear for sociology exam, while the boy left home for his chemistry paper. Instead of reaching their centres, they headed to Swayambhu Kaleshwarnath Temple in Sakaldiha around noon. The girl's family members accompanied the couple. Before they could enter the temple, the boy's family reached and created a commotion.

Sakaldiha police station in-charge Bhupendra Nishad said police stalled the wedding plan. "We noted there was enough time to take them to their exam centres. Two police teams took the boy and girl to their exam centres," Nishad said.

Gaganyaan: Isro's tracking antenna reaches Cocos Island in Australia

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Bengaluru: The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has completed transportation of its antenna to be installed at the telemetry, tracking and command (TTC) for the station it is setting up in Australia's Cocos (Keeling) Island for tracking of the Gaganyaan orbital module.

TOI was the first to report that Isro and the Australian Space Agency (ASA) were in talks for the said tracking station at Cocos (Keeling) Islands, in 2021. And, in 2022, the implementation arrangement with ASA was executed for establishing transportable TTC terminal at Cocos Island for ascent phase support.

The Australian Space Agency officially confirmed the development and said: "Australia's support for India's Gaganyaan Human Space Flight Programme has reached new heights with Isro's tracking antenna, and control, storage and mess containers from Nova Systems arriving at Site 6 of the Old Quarantine Station on the Cocos Islands."

Isro will need a 360° view for Gaganyaan as it cannot afford to have any blind spot, and the station in Australia is part of a larger initiative to have

Australian Space Agency

TRACKING OF ORBITAL MODULE

stations in multiple locations, aside from using stations belonging to other space agencies through agreements.

An ASA spokesperson had told TOI earlier that aside from providing the site for the tracking station at Cocos Island, ASA would also lead cross-govt coordination on Isro's request to place temporary ground station tracking facilities. "…This includes facilitating advice to Isro from a number of Commonwealth agencies which will need to grant approvals for the project to go ahead," the spokesperson had said.

Isro, which is targeting the launch of the first uncrewed mission under Gaganyaan this year, has said that it has completed more than 8,000 ground tests in 2025, moving into the final phase of preparations for its first uncrewed mission.

As per Isro, a High-Level Review Committee was set up for close monitoring, alongside a comprehensive zero-based audit of documents.

"Organisational changes were introduced in the Environmental Control and Life Support System based on available expertise across centres. An Integrated Mission Review Committee is examining critical aspects to address design and simulation gaps and strengthen mission strategy."

All propulsion tests required for human rating have been completed. Software simulations are under way at multiple test beds, with environmental tests expected to conclude shortly to keep the uncrewed mission on schedule. On the hardware front, the first Integrated Air Drop Test validated parachute deployment and sea recovery of the crew module. Parachute deployment and recovery systems were also tested through air-drop and drogue parachute trials. Experience from the Axiom-4 mission, which carried Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla to the International Space Station, is being fed back into training and mission planning.

CBI files fresh case against Anil, RCom over ₹2.2k cr fraud

Times News Network

New Delhi: CBI on Thursday conducted searches at Anil Ambani's residence and the registered offices of Reliance Communications in connection with an FIR it had registered against the industrialist earlier in the day following a complaint of bank fraud. The allegations involve conspiracy, cheating and diversion of over Rs 2,200 crore through fictitious transactions and manipulated accounts.

The new FIR names Ambani, promoter and former chairman of RCom, alongside the company and other unidentified individuals. The agency has invoked sections of Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act, citing criminal misconduct and abuse of official positions. It is alleged that Bank of Baroda suffered a loss exceeding Rs 2,220 crore after credit facilities were siphoned off through shell entities and related-party transactions designed to mask the true financial health of the telecom company. The procedural delay in the case was primarily due to a long-standing legal battle. This probe, CBI said, remains separate from an ongoing SBI-led consortium case.

Anil Ambani appears before ED to record statement

New Delhi: A day after ED attached his Mumbai residence worth More than Rs 3,500 crore Anil Ambani appeared before the agency at its headquarters here on Thursday to record his statements in a money laundering case against his R-ADAG group entity Reliance Communication.

Ambani and his associates are being investigated for a banking fraud of more than Rs 40,000 crore involving Reliance Communication (Rcom). This was Ambani's second appearance before the agency. He was questioned on August last year in the same case, but had skipped subsequent summons. The interrogation on Thursday followed his promise to Supreme Court that he would appear before the agency. The agency has, meanwhile, carried out multiple search operations at his residence and offices, as well as premises of some of his close associates. Earlier this month, the agency had summoned both Ambani and his wife Tina for questioning at its headquarters here.

The ED had earlier arrested one of Ambani's close aides, Punit Garg following the "discovery" of the purchase of an apartment in Manhattan, New York worth over Rs 70 crore, allegedly using the proceeds of crime laundered from bank loans one of his group entities had received in India. TNN

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